



**Confederation
of School Trusts**

The Core Responsibilities of a School Trust Chief Executive Officer



November 2021

Pre-amble

The aim of this work is to produce a definite set of core responsibilities for School Trust Chief Executive Officers (CEOs).

As the sector body for School Trusts, CST has carried out this work in consultation with serving CEOs because systematic change has created this relatively new leadership position CEO within the education sector, with Trusts held accountable as charitable organisations by the Department for Education, regulators and stakeholder communities. There is currently little agreement across the sector on what this title means in terms of job descriptions, operational standards, accountability measures or salaries.

The core responsibilities for School Trust CEOs include the statutory and regulatory functions of the Accounting Officer (see Appendix A) and define the core elements of professional conduct.

These core responsibilities have been determined for the person who is the Accounting Officer for the Trust and has an overarching, strategic role. The Trust Leader of smaller and single academy Trusts will have the same Accounting Officer responsibilities as those leading larger Trusts. These core responsibilities can be used for leaders of smaller trusts, recognising that the major difference will not be in the responsibilities themselves but in the way they are enacted in practice. (See Appendix B)

These core responsibilities build upon existing standard-setting work, including the 2020 Headteachers' Standards and have been developed to act as baseline benchmarks for all CEOs. These have been developed as core responsibilities for all Trusts and it recognised that CEOs of some types of School Trusts, such as faith-based Trusts, may have specific additional core responsibilities.

The core responsibilities include how CEOs work with Trustees. While responsibility for Trust governance sits with the Trust Board, CEOs are responsible for working in close partnership with the Trust Board and are held accountable by it. (See Appendix C)

This document is for CEOs, aspiring CEOs, and Chairs of Trustees. It aims to underpin key aspects of leadership development and governance by offering a framework to inform executive performance review, executive development, organisation design and recruitment.

School Trust Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Core Responsibilities

Introduction

This paper examines:

- what the School Trust CEO role exists to do; that is to specify the job purpose;
- the expected behaviours and professional conduct of those leading School Trusts; and
- the core responsibilities of a School Trust Chief Executive Officer.

Whilst a CEO will hold all these core responsibilities and be accountable for ensuring that they are met, it is recognised that they will meet some through the successful leadership and management of teams and individuals within the Trust. It is therefore not expected that the core responsibilities will be enacted operationally, in all cases, by the CEO.

1. Job purpose

A School Trust CEO is responsible for the education of all the young people in the Trust's academies. They lead the Executive Team of the Trust, ensuring the Trust and all its schools are successful over time in a sustainable way. They provide high level strategic leadership and management across all aspects of the Trust's activities. They ensure that the Trust provides high quality education for all its pupils through the effective and efficient use of resources and people. As a system leader, the CEO represents the Trust with a wide range of stakeholders and partners and enables the Trust to fulfil its civic responsibilities. They are the Accounting Officer for the Trust, responsible for ensuring the Trust meets its statutory and legal requirements.

2. Ethics and Professional Conduct

As leaders of educational charities CEOs of School Trusts are expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of principled and professional conduct. School Trust CEOs should always uphold and demonstrate The Principles of Public Life (The Nolan Principles).

School Trust CEOs are responsible for upholding public trust in Trust, civic and system leadership, and should maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour. As leaders of School Trusts, their academy communities and the profession, CEOs should serve in the best interests of the Trust's pupils, conducting themselves in a manner compatible with their influential position in society.

3. CEO Core Responsibilities

Academy Trusts are education charities that run schools to give children a better future. Every Trust has a single legal and moral purpose: to advance education for the public benefit. Church Trusts may have additional charitable objects. School Trust CEOs have specific responsibilities as executive leaders of the Trust.

There are six interlinked areas of a School Trust CEO's core responsibilities. These are:

- Strategic leadership - Trust values, culture and strategy
- Quality of Education
- Finance, sustainability and compliance
- People strategy
- Governance and accountability
- System leadership and civic responsibility

Strategic leadership – Trust values, culture, and strategy

- Establish and sustain the Trust's values, culture, and strategic direction in partnership with the Trust Board
- Provide leadership that enables the Trust to achieve its strategic objectives and secure its future sustainability

- Create a safe, inclusive and positive culture across the Trust and its schools
- Develop operational objectives that are appropriate, deliverable and aligned to securing a sustainable future through the Trust's strategic direction
- Enable the Trust's organisational design and operational systems to meet its current and future requirements and manage change effectively

Quality of Education

- Tackle educational inequality, upholding and securing ambitious educational and behavioural standards for all pupils
- Promote further support for the most disadvantaged and those with additional and special educational needs and disabilities within a safe and secure environment
- Enable the Trust to establish and sustain a broad, rich and coherent curriculum entitlement for all pupils, supported by effective curricular leadership and delivered through high quality teaching in all its schools
- Ensure the Trust has high quality, expert teaching in all the Trust's schools, built on an evidence-informed understanding of effective teaching and how pupils learn
- Ensure that priority areas for improvement are identified
- Enable the Trust and its schools to engage with appropriate evidence-based strategies for improvement and ensure their effective implementation

Finance, sustainability and compliance

- Ensure that sound financial management systems are in place
- Prioritise and allocate financial resources appropriately, ensuring efficiency, effectiveness and probity in the use of public funds
- Ensure rigorous approaches to identifying, managing and mitigating risk
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of the Trust and its schools through effective financial and estates management
- Direct the Trust's activities to achieve the most efficient, effective and sustainable provision of education to the highest quality, prioritising and making the most effective use of the resources available.
- Ensure the organisation complies with all statutory and legal requirements including safeguarding and health and safety

People strategy

- Lead and effectively manage the activities and performance of the Trust's executive team
- Enable a people strategy that identifies talent, supports and develops all staff and sustains a culture of staff well-being and high staff professionalism
- Ensure the Trust has high quality employment practices that promote equality, diversity and inclusion, including ethical practices of recruitment and retention of staff

- Ensure staff have access to high quality professional development, aligned to balance organisational and individual needs
- Ensure the Trust has a strong talent management and succession planning programmes across all areas of the organisation's work

Accountability and Governance

- Promote a culture of accountability that is recognised and accepted as an essential element of improvement at all levels and across all aspects of the Trust's work
- Understand the role of relevant regulatory bodies and ensure the Trust and its schools respond to their requirements
- Understand and welcome the role of effective Trust governance, upholding the obligation to give account and recognising that Trust Boards are ultimately responsible and accountable for the Trust's work
- Develop and maintain effective relationships with the Trust Board recognising their key role in holding the CEO and executive team to account
- Ensure the Trust Board receives quality information in the level of detail needed to make informed decisions and fulfil its functions and legal obligations
- Ensure positive communications that promote the Trust and its work, and present the Trust effectively when dealing with the media

System leadership and civic responsibility

- Promote and enable ways in which the Trust's schools and their local boards engage meaningfully with their communities and are responsive and accountable to them
- In line with the Trust's civic role, work with civic partners and stakeholders in the local area, region and/or nationally to contribute to the Public Good, ensuring the value of the child and coherent public service for children and families
- Foster and engage in the collective leadership of the sector building strong local systems to address disadvantage and improve the quality of education for all pupils
- Exert external influence on behalf of the Trust by active engagement with sector organisations, regulators, policy makers, local and national government, industry and other partners
- Give public assurance of high standards of probity

Appendix A: Accounting Officer Responsibilities

The Accounting Officer responsibilities are given the Academies Trust Handbook sections 1.37 – 1.44. The designated responsibilities are:

- Give assurance (to Parliament and the public) of high standards of probity in the management of public funds, particularly regularity, propriety and value for money
- Adhering to the Seven Principles of Public Life
- Having oversight of financial transactions (under Trustees' control, measures to prevent losses or misuse, multi-person operation of accounts and records, accurate accounting records)
- Completing annual statement on regularity, propriety and compliance
- Taking personal responsibility for assuring compliance to the Board
- Advising on Board intent or action if incompatible with the articles, funding agreement or handbook
- Notify the ESFA if they consider the Board is in breach of the articles, funding agreement or handbook

Appendix B: Working with Trustees

CEOs work closely with their Trust Board, particularly the Chair. CEOs will recognise the responsibilities and statutory duties of Trustees and that the CEO operates under the oversight and direction of the Board of Trustees.

The Academy Trust Handbook indicates that Trustees must comply with the Trust's charitable objects, with company and charitable law and with their contractual obligations under the funding agreement. As an organisation the Trust has a range of obligations under current legislation and statutory guidance. This includes matters such as safeguarding, health and safety and estates management. The Academy Trust Handbook states that ensuring strong governance in these areas will be a key priority for the Board.

The Academy Trust Handbook indicates that Trustees should focus on three core functions:

- ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff
- overseeing and ensuring effective financial performance

CEOs will recognise that in fulfilling these core functions Trust Boards are ultimately responsible for approving and monitoring certain aspects of a Trust's work including the Trust's vision and strategy.

Appendix C: Information about job titles and size of Trusts

The terminology around Trust leadership can be confusing. The term Executive Head is currently sometimes used as an alternative to CEO for someone that is the Accounting Officer and leads a Trust of several schools and is not the Head of any of the schools. In these cases that person is essentially fulfilling the same responsibilities as the role described here for the CEO. However, there are some Executive Heads who are not the Accounting Officer as they work leading a group for schools within a Trust and work to a CEO. In other cases, the term Executive Head is used to describe the leader of a single academy Trust where the person is also the substantive Headteacher of the school.

In their guidance on ‘Setting Pay for Executive Heads/Principals and Chief Executive Officers’ ASCL reference different leadership structures. They indicated three models:

1. The executive head/principal basic model where the executive head/principal is the substantive headteacher of all the schools in the group.
2. The executive head/principal mixed model where the executive head/principal is the substantive headteacher of one school in the group and has an overarching, strategic role for the group.
3. The CEO model where each of the schools in the group has its own headteacher. The CEO has an overarching, strategic role, without being the substantive head of any of the schools in the group.

The core responsibilities given in this document relate specifically to the third model above, whilst acknowledging that these core responsibilities can also be used for leaders of smaller trusts, recognising that the major difference will not be in the responsibilities themselves but in the way they are enacted in practice.

The core responsibilities as set out above are not related to Trust size but to Trust structure as indicated above. Looking to link core responsibilities to Trust size could be difficult as there is no accepted way of defining Trust size. A range of definitions have been used over time and these are likely to continue to change as the system itself changes. Sometimes the size of a Trust is defined by the number of pupils in the Trust’s schools and in other documents by the number of schools. The reality is that it is probably a combination of the two as well as the geographical spread, context, phase and nature of the schools. Although there are transition points at which a Trust may need to amend its structure as it grows these are not currently well defined.

As the sector body and national organisation for School Trusts in England, CST provides guidance, support, and advocacy in a range of related activities. For CEOs, we provide a professional community that connects CEOs to each other and supports policy and practice development within School Trusts. We also provide consultancy support to Trust Boards for CEO performance reviews and external reviews of governance and operational effectiveness.

We welcome feedback on the core responsibilities and will keep our standard-setting work live as the system changes.



The Confederation of School Trusts (CST) is the national organisation and sector body for School Trusts in England advocating for, connecting and supporting executive and governance leaders. We are a membership organisation of organisations. This means that the organisation – the Trust – is the member. Our mission is to build an excellent education system in England – every school part of a strong and sustainable group in which every child is a powerful learner and adults learn and develop together as teachers and leaders.

The Governance Advisory Service is delivered by CST Professional Development Ltd on behalf of CST. CST Professional Development Ltd is a wholly owned subsidiary of CST.

The Governance Advisory Service is a safe, confidential and quality-assured service run by specialists in School Trust governance and draws on the daily experience of CST as the national organisation and sector body for School Trusts.

We provide bespoke advisory services to match your current and future needs as a trust, helping you to keep your governance fully aligned to the expectations on trusts, the operational reality of your schools and with national best practice.

Tel: 0115 917 0142
Email: admin@cstuk.org.uk
Address: Suite 1, Whiteley Mill
Offices, 39 Nottingham Road,
Stapleford, NG9 8AD

 [@CSTvoice](https://twitter.com/CSTvoice)
cstuk.org.uk

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