



Salary survey of executive leadership roles in school trusts 2025

About the Confederation of School Trusts

The Confederation of School Trusts is the national organisation and sector body for school trusts in England, advocating for, connecting, and supporting executive and governance leaders. Our members are responsible for the education of nearly four million young people.

Bringing together trusts from every region and of every size, CST has a strong, strategic presence with access to government and policy makers to drive real change for education on the big issues that matter most.

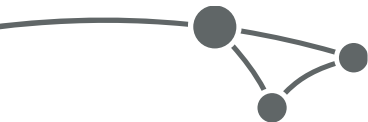
About Compensation Planning from Brightmine

Compensation Planning is one of the largest reported reward datasets in the UK with over 1.5 million employees. Compensation Planning is a Brightmine product, and part of the RELX Group – a trusted provider of data since 1968. It provides expert insight and practical tools to help organisations make fair, data-driven reward benchmarking decisions – from submission to using the data – as easily and efficiently as possible.

About Browne Jacobson

Independently recognised as one of the best education law practices in the country, Browne Jacobson has a wealth of sector-specific knowledge and experience to assist School Trusts, managing estate and construction projects, employment issues and funding matters, to intellectual property, health and safety, defamation and disputes. The firm has bases in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Exeter, Dublin, Cardiff, and Nottingham.





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Foreword



Welcome to the 2025 salary survey of executive roles in school trusts, presented by the Confederation of School Trusts in partnership with Brightmine and Browne Jacobson.

This is the fifth year we have published this survey, and our latest data covers a record number of roles, with pay data for more than 2,800 senior roles in school trusts and many thousands more in Brightmine's wider benchmarking database.

We rely on finance and HR teams across the country to help us collate this information, and we thank them for their continued support.

Often when we talk about pay the focus is on the amount paid to chief executives, and it is right that this is carefully scrutinised. The Academy Trust Handbook, part of the regulatory framework for trusts, has been clear for many years that trusts must consider their approach to pay carefully, and this has been strengthened further in this year's edition.

The evidence of the survey is this is already well-embedded within the system, with median pay for chief executives again changing in line with the 4% settlement for most teaching staff.

At £149,790 median trust CEO pay is below the top of the statutory pay range for maintained school leadership, which goes up to £153,490 for inner London, despite the wider responsibilities that frequently go with the role compared to that of a headteacher.

Compared to similar senior roles in other sectors, trust CEO pay is well behind that of business, slightly under that of the wider public sector, and broadly in line with other charities and not-for-profit organisations.

Looking across trusts, pay generally reflects the size of the trust. While there remains a gender pay gap for our most senior leaders, it has more than halved since 2023 and now stands at 3.4%. The evidence is that trusts and their boards are taking their responsibilities seriously.

The detailed report goes beyond chief executive pay to review other leadership roles, and we hope there is much to help trusts in their wider approach to pay.

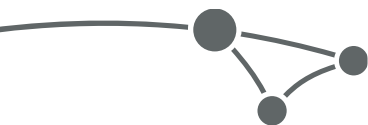
Basic salary, though, is only one element of employment. The wider culture of an organisation, and its mission, is frequently just as important when choosing where to work. A commitment to training, to widening opportunities, to being flexible, responsible, and caring organisations matters greatly too.

As the employer body for trusts, CST's mission is to support our school trusts across all those aspects as they continue to improve education across England, and to create places where children and the adults that support them can flourish.

Leora Cruddas CBE

Chief Executive

Confederation of School Trusts



Glossary of terms

Salary tables

Lower quartile: When all salaries are set out in ascending order, the figure below which one-quarter of all salaries lie. Shown in salary tables as LQ.

Median: When all salaries are set out in ascending order, the figure below which half of all salaries lie. Shown in salary tables as Med.

Upper quartile: When all salaries are set out in ascending order, the figure below which three-quarters of all salaries lie. Shown in salary tables as UQ.

Average: The sum of all individual salaries divided by the number of individuals. Shown in salary tables as Av.

Sample: The data used in a given survey or table. NB: the sample size (i.e. number of records) for many tables is likely to be less than the sample size for the survey as a whole as refinements (eg by region or job function) will lead to the exclusion of some individuals.

Number in sample: The number of individual salaries in the sample. Shown in salary tables as Ind. No.

Basic pay or basic salary: Annualised cash payment of basic salary including London or other location allowances, merit/performance pay and skills supplement if they are pensionable items and excluding mortgage subsidies, standby allowances, car allowances, shift, overtime and bonus payments.

Total earnings: Basic annual salary before deductions for tax, national insurance, pension contributions etc but including London or other location allowances, performance or skills supplements plus any bonuses, commission payments and mortgage subsidies as well as any shift or standby allowance paid and other cash allowances and honorarium.

Region: Regional breakdowns are provided for two broad areas – London, and the UK excluding London. This is in order to reflect some significant variations in the London market compared to the rest of the UK.

Pupil numbers: Please note that not all contributors provided information on pupil numbers. Any not providing this information are excluded from all analysis where this measure is applied as a filter.



Number of participating organisations

The tables below summarise the number of participating organisations (Org. No.) and the number of individual employees they provided data for (Ind. No.) as well as a summary of the number of individual records as a percentage of the overall total.

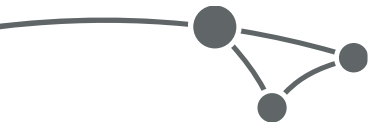
Summary by Job Level of employee

	Ind. No	Ind. %	Org. No.
Chief executive*	126	4.4	118
Senior director	280	9.8	102
Director	552	19.2	89
Senior function head	643	22.4	72
Function head	588	20.5	56
Department manager	681	23.7	54
Whole sample	2,870	100.0	126

*note – it is not unusual for there to be more CEO's recorded than organisations, we have seen this every year that this research has been conducted – this is usually due to a mixture of job shares and cross overs in roles etc (such as an outgoing CEO still in post for a short while at the same time as an incumbent – on paper at least)..

Summary by number of schools within the trust

	Ind. No	Ind. %	Org. No.
1 - 5	330	11.5	32
6 - 10	556	19.4	46
11 - 20	801	27.9	35
21 or more	1,183	41.2	13
Whole sample	2,870	100.0	126

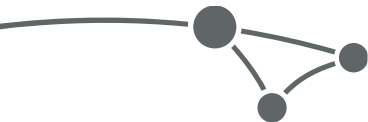


Summary by number of pupils within the trust

	Ind. No	Ind. %	Org. No.
2,000 or fewer	128	4.5	18
2,001 – 5,000	392	13.7	42
5,001 – 10,000	551	19.2	29
More than 10,000	214	7.5	5
Not provided	1,585	55.2	32
Whole sample	2,870	100.0	126

Summary by location of trust

	Ind. No	Ind. %	Org. No.
London	962	33.7	33
Rest of the UK (excluding London)	1,890	66.3	99
Whole sample	2,870	100.0	126



Salary tables

Level 10 (CEO)

Incumbents at this level will hold the most senior executive role in an organisation. They are accountable for the educational achievement of pupils and the mid to long term financial viability of the organisation. Along with the rest of the executive team, is responsible for creating trust strategy for ratification by the board.

Headline figures

£149,790

National median
basic salary

£151,203

National median
total cash earnings

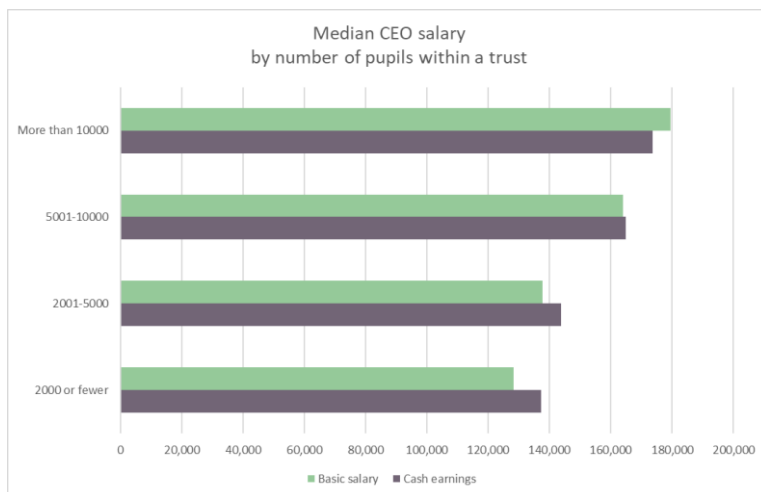
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Sample size
(no. of individuals)

Year on year changes

The median basic salary for CEOs increased by 4% in 2025 compared with 2024. CEOs in the sample had a larger year-on-year increase compared to the total for all senior staff (Levels 10-15), whose salaries rose by 3.4%. The level of staff enjoying the highest increase in basic pay across the 12 month period was that of Function Head, where median basic salaries increased by 5.7%.

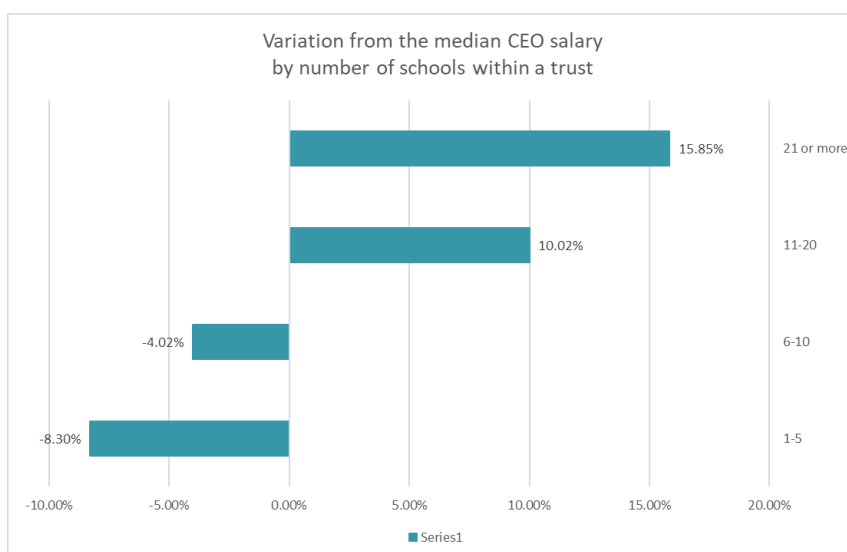
Number of pupils within the trust

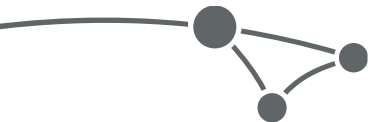


This year, CEO salaries increased in line with the number of pupils within a trust. In 2024, Last year we saw CEOs in trusts with up to 2,000 pupils having a median salary which was slightly higher than that for those in trusts with 2,001–5,000 pupils. We see a normalisation this year and in fact the overall median basic salary for the smallest trusts (in terms of pupil numbers) is slightly lower than the measure reported a year ago.

The median salary for CEOs in the two largest trust sizes, based on pupil numbers, continues to be higher than the overall sample median. Those in trusts with 5,001-10,000 pupils receive a basic salary that is 9.4% higher than the whole sample median, while those in trusts with over 10,000 pupils receive a basic salary that is 19.8% higher.

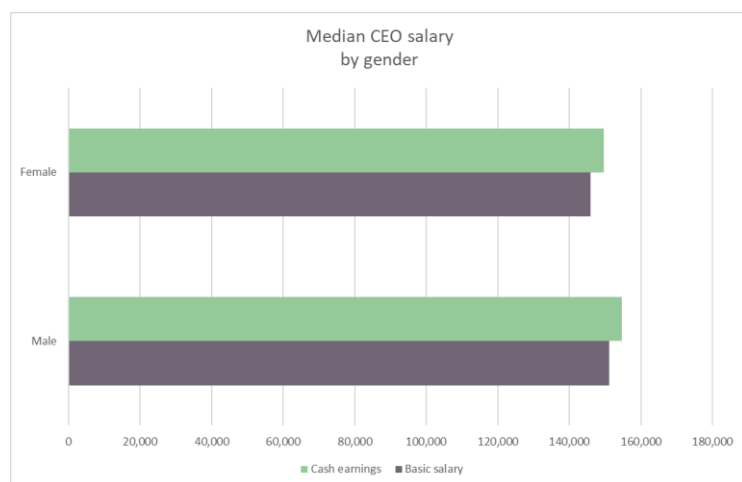
Number of schools within the trust



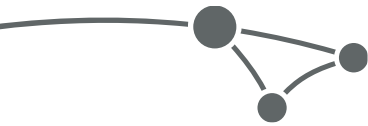


Consistent with previous years, median CEO salaries in 2025 increase in line with the number of schools within the trust. CEOs of the smallest trusts with up to five schools receive a median base salary of £137,352, 8.3% lower than the whole sample median. CEOs in the largest trusts have a median salary of £173,532, 15.6% higher than the whole sample median.

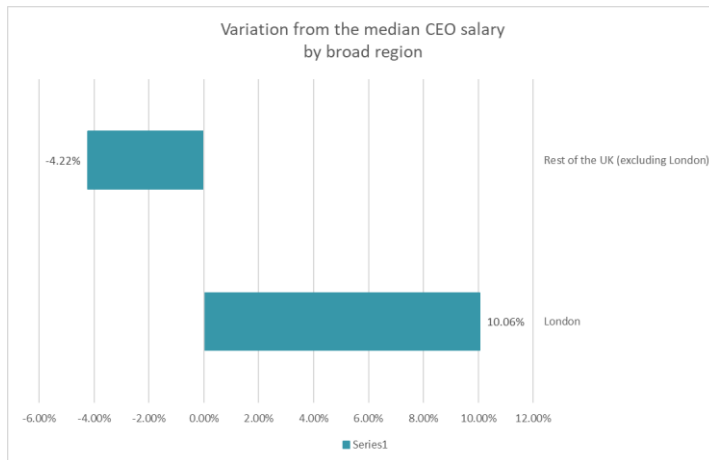
Gender



The median salary of female CEOs continues to be lower than that of their male counterparts, with women earning £5,087 less than men (which is narrower than the £8,634 recorded a year ago). The gap between men and women has narrowed each year over the past three years, standing at 3.4% compared to 5.8% in 2024, and 7% in 2023.



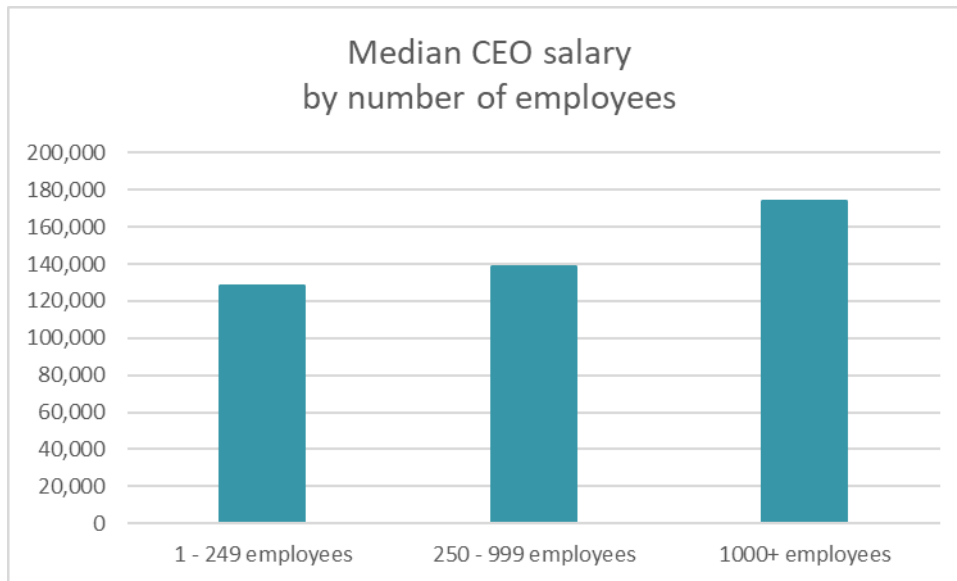
Region



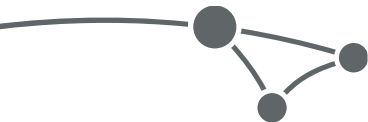
The median basic salary for CEOs in London stands at £164,851, which is 10% higher than the whole sample median and 14.9% higher than the median salary for the rest of the UK.



Number of employees



The median salary for CEOs with the largest number of staff is 16.2% higher than the median salary for all CEOs in the sample. While CEOs of trusts with less than 250 employees have the lowest median salary at £128,275, 14.4% lower than the whole sample median.



Salary tables

Level 12 (Operations Director)

Job holders at this level will almost always attend the board or executive committee of the organisation. As part of the executive team, is responsible for creating trust strategy for ratification by the board and then delivering this strategy.

Headline figures

£81,441

Median basic salary

£81,489

Median total cash
earnings

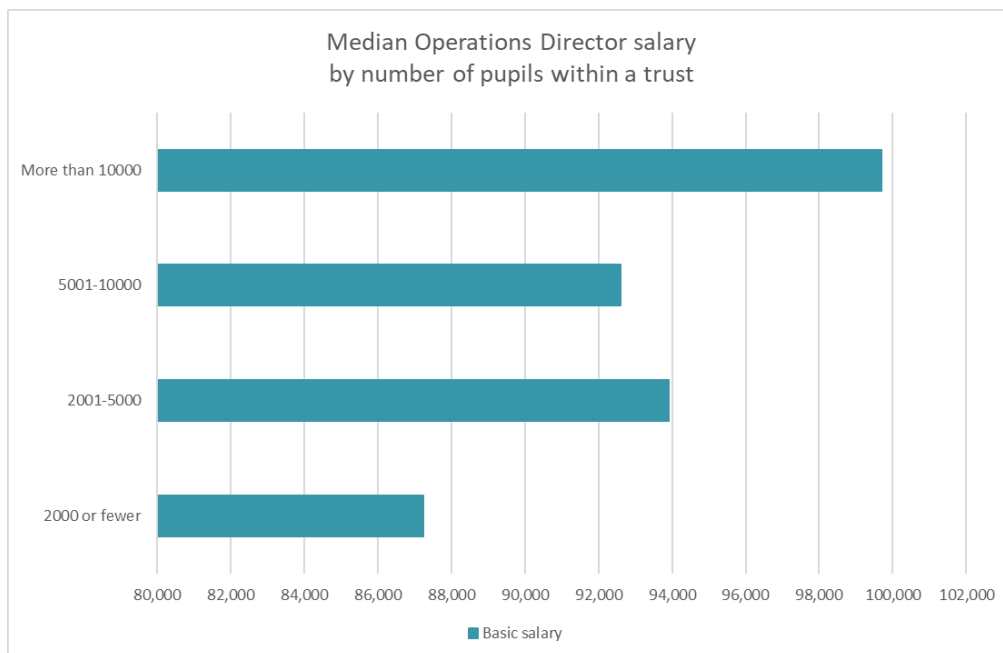
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Sample size (no. of individuals)

Year on year changes

A matched sample analysis indicates the median basic salary for Directors (of any function) has increased by 3.7% in 2025, when compared with 2024. This represents a slowing in the rate of increase year on year, which stood at 9.1% in 2024, compared with 2023.

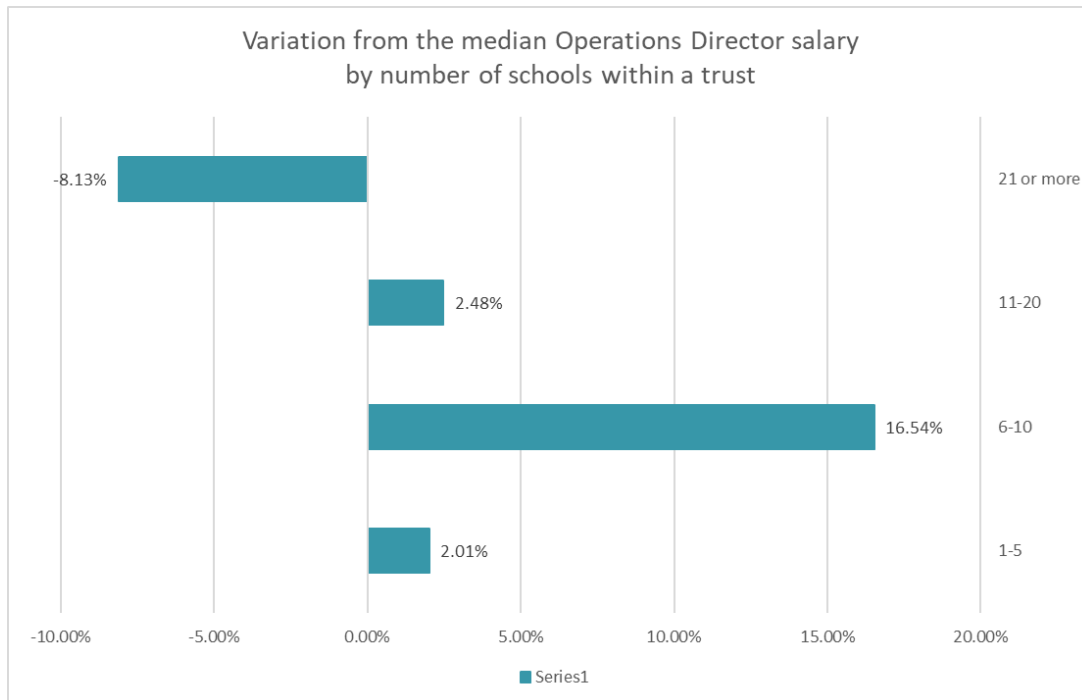
Number of pupils within the trust



The median Operations Director salary broadly increases in line with pupil numbers, in that the trusts with the highest number of pupils pay the highest median salaries, and the trusts with the smallest number of pupils pay the lowest median salaries. However, in between these two extremes salaries do not follow the same pattern and trusts with 5000-10000 pupils see median salaries slightly lower than those with 2001-5000 pupils.

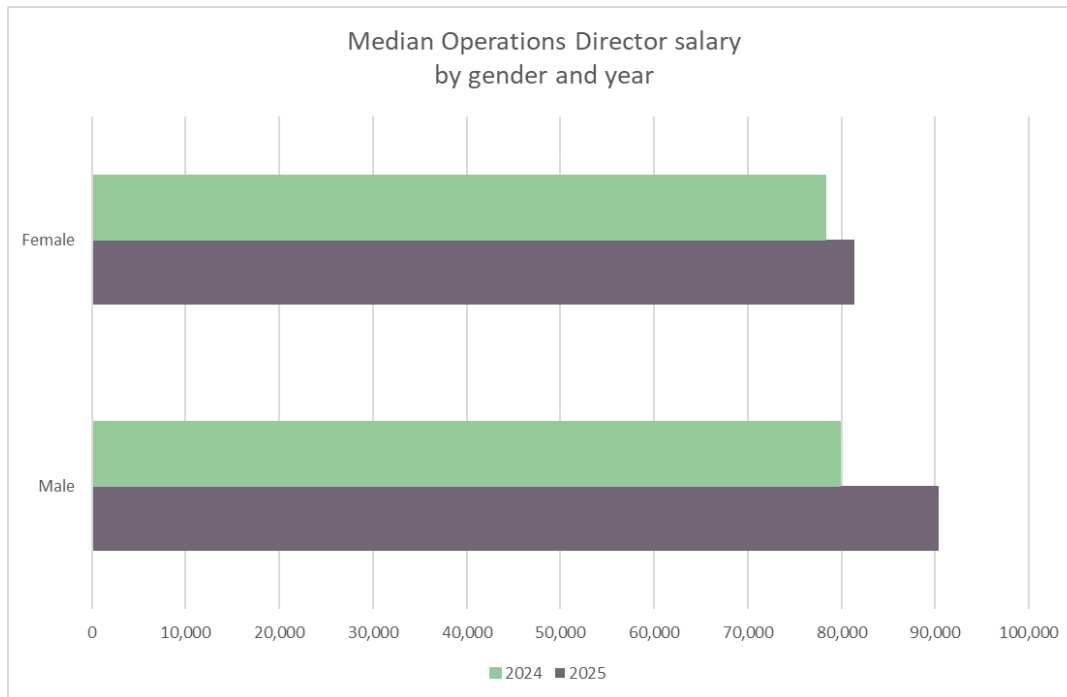
Note: some respondents did not provide details of their pupil numbers.

Number of schools within the trust

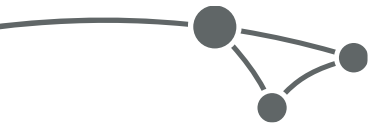


Consistent with the last two years, Operations Directors in trusts with the largest number of schools (21 or more) receive the lowest median salary of £74,850, a figure that is largely unchanged across 48 months. Operations Directors working in all other trust sizes receive a median salary that is larger than the whole sample median, peaking at a median salary of £94,911 in trusts with 6-10 schools.

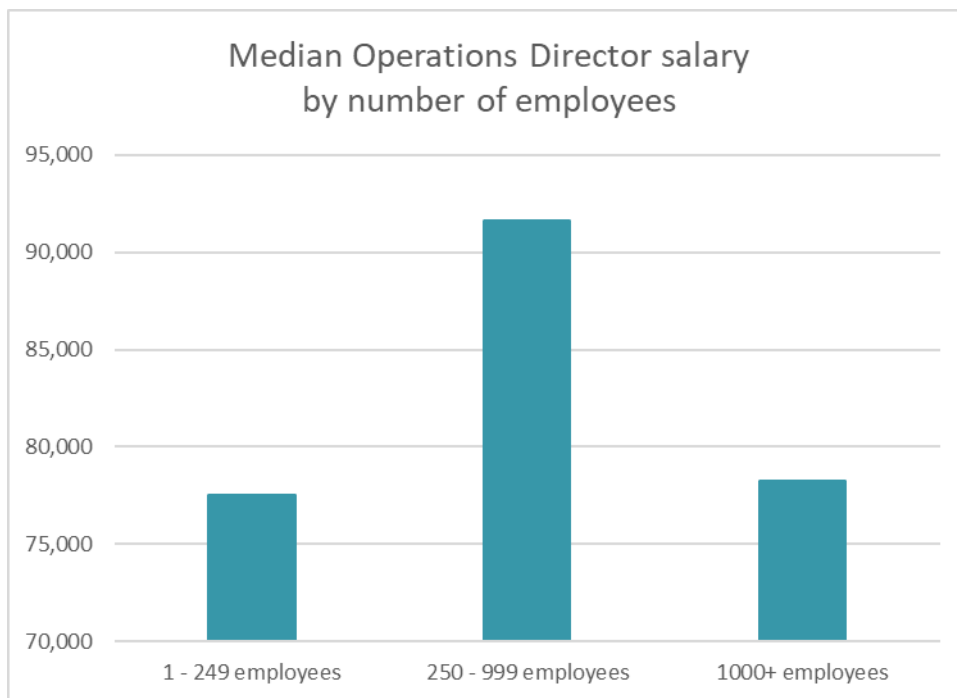
Gender



Male Operations Directors continue to have a median salary that is higher than that of their female counterparts, and the gap has increased notably compared to 2024. In 2024, men earn a median salary which was 2% more than women. In 2025 this gap has widened to 11.2%.



Number of employees



The highest median Operations Director salary is seen in mid-sized organisations, standing 12.5% higher than the whole sample median.



Tables

Median basic salary, by broad industry sector

	School trusts	Private sector services	Manufacturing and production	Public services	Charities / not for profit
10 Chief executive	£149,790	£376,265	£495,000	£161,865	£147,621
11 Senior director	£109,135	£211,240	£200,000	£120,458	£129,107
12 Director	£81,440	£145,000	£126,072	£99,067	£102,907
13 Senior function head	£72,162	£114,400	£100,000	£87,675	£88,259
14 Function head	£62,570	£94,444	£87,914	£80,784	£73,542
15 Department manager	£55,476	£80,000	£75,000	£72,335	£64,622

Organisation size, by broad industry sector

	Average annual turnover, £	Average number of employees	Number of participating organisations
Private sector services	£1,600,000,000	5,799	550
Manufacturing and production	£356,000,000	1,300	233
Public services	£204,137,000	2,812	337
Charities / not for profit	£60,647,000	791	342
School trusts	£46,000,021	936	126



Background

About this survey

This report summarises some of the key findings from the fifth national annual salary survey of executive leadership roles for school trusts.

The data collected through this research will give trust boards much-needed robust benchmark data to support fair and transparent decisions about executive reward. This headline report focuses on high level results and is not intended to provide sufficient information to inform decision making. We strongly urge those who wish to undertake further work as a result of this exercise, to access and scrutinise the full survey results. Those wishing to delve deeper into the data can subscribe to the Brightmine Compensation Planning platform, to get a credible evidence base for their trusts decisions around pay.

Full survey results

The full survey results offer great depth and granularity in the breakdown of the results, allowing comparisons to be refined by parameters such as trust size (both number of schools within the trust and pupil numbers across the trust), detailed UK region, comparisons of part time and full time staff employees and article-based content summarizing pension provision and contribution and health benefits.

Why you need robust market pay data

HR professionals across all industry sectors increasingly turn to salary survey reports to access reliable, accurate, market pay data to inform and implement reward strategies. This data is increasingly used in ensuring pay levels are competitive yet fair, making informed pay review decisions and setting the right pay levels for new employees.



How to access the full survey results

The full benchmark dataset is now available for trusts to purchase and interrogate via our Brightmine Compensation Planning platform. CST members and all participants in this benchmarking study are able to subscribe to Brightmine Compensation Planning. Please get in touch with us at helpdesk.uk@brightmine.com for further information or to register your interest.

How we collect the data

Brightmine uses a consistent methodology to collect, verify and analyse data.

All data for any given survey is collected as accurate on a given date, to ensure that pay data is consistent from one participant to the next, and to allow year-on-year trends to be accurately calculated and reported.

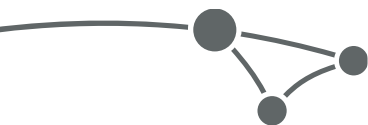
Participants are asked to complete two questionnaires for each survey:

- ✓ an organisation questionnaire which establishes characteristics of the company that can be applied to all individuals within it (eg the number of employees, turnover and industry group); and
- ✓ an individual questionnaire, which collects demographic, pay and benefits data for each employee as a unique line in a standard spreadsheet. Please note that for data protection reasons we cannot accept data that includes individual employee names, initials or similar information that might lead to their identification. However, we do ask participants to provide a unique but anonymous number or code enabling us to track changes in pay and employment status from one year to the next.

Data submitted to Brightmine on both questionnaires is further anonymised by the removal of the company name and contact details before it is added to our database and analysed.

How we check the data

Brightmine carries out a series of validation checks and audits on data to ensure that it is accurate and to identify anomalies that can be checked before being released for analysis and reporting. These include:



- ✓ checks within one organisation's spreadsheet – to ensure that all salaries submitted are within expected parameters, and that answers to linked questions are as expected;
- ✓ checks between one organisation's data and the whole survey data – to ensure that the salaries for one organisation are not consistently out of line with those for all other organisations; and
- ✓ checks from one year's survey database to the next – to ensure that trends are either as expected or can be explained.

Where anomalies are identified, Brightmine staff will ask participants to verify or amend data to ensure it is accurate. Further audits of the data are then carried out to ensure that no organisation dominates any given survey or table.

Where an organisation has previously submitted data for a Brightmine salary survey, this will be returned to the organisation for checking before subsequent publication – saving the participant from the time and effort involved in the initial submission.

How we analyse the data

This report includes a selection of salary tables. Further and more detailed breakdowns are available using the online Brightmine JobPricing tool.

Where possible, the sample size is shown on each line of every table. By default, we report the average, median and quartile salaries for each line. However, to protect the identity of participating organisations and individual employees:

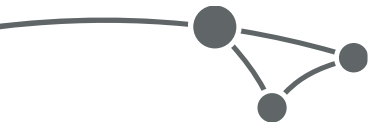
- ✓ no figures of any sort will be shown where the sample is less than four;
- ✓ median or average figures only are shown where the sample is greater than four; and
- ✓ a full quartile distribution is shown where the sample is greater than eight.

As an additional safeguard, no data will be published where all individuals in a data line are drawn from a single company.



Brightmine job levels

Level Code	Level Label	Level Descriptor
10	Chief Executive	Incumbents at this level will hold the most senior executive role in an organisation. They are accountable for the educational achievement of pupils and the mid to long term financial viability of the organisation. Along with the rest of the executive team, is responsible for creating trust strategy for ratification by the board.
11	Senior Director	Incumbents at this job level will hold the next most senior executive role below the chief executive. As part of the executive team, is responsible for creating trust strategy for ratification by the board and then delivering this strategy.
12	Director	Job holders at this level will almost always attend the board or executive committee of the organisation. As part of the executive team, is responsible for creating trust strategy for ratification by the board and then delivering this strategy.
13	Senior Function Head	Job holders at this level of seniority are often directors and senior managers who do not attend the main board or executive team but may otherwise part of the senior leadership team and have significant managerial input into the direction of the Trust. Smaller trusts may not have staff operating at this level and heads of function may be found at level 14.
14	Function Head	Incumbents at this job level will head up a functional area of an organisation. They are unlikely to sit on the SLT though may work closely with executive team members. In smaller Trusts staff at this level may sit just below the main executive team as they may not have staff at level 13.
15	Department Manager	Incumbents at this level will lead a particular department area and will most likely report to a head of function, though in smaller trusts may report directly to a Director.



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About Brightmine™

Global leader Brightmine empowers organizations to shape HR strategy, manage employee risk and embrace diverse talent ecosystems to create equitable, high-performing and purposeful workplaces. Since 2002, the data analytics and intelligent solutions provider has earned a reputation for providing expert insights, trusted resources and practical tools to help customers achieve greater efficiency, improve compliance and increase employee engagement. Brightmine is proud to be part of the LexisNexis® portfolio within RELX, a global provider of information-based analytics and decision tools for professional and business customers. To learn more visit brightmine.com.



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