



Appointment of Chief People Officer

Candidate Briefing Pack
September 2026

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1. Welcome Message

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in the role of Chief People Officer at Orchard Hill College Academy Trust (OHCAT).

Orchard Hill College Academy Trust (OHCAT) is a family of specialist academies supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities across London, Surrey, Sussex, and Berkshire. The Trust operates 13 special schools, alongside integrated support services including therapy and nursing, and a central team providing expertise across HR and Training, Finance, IT, Estates and Facilities, Governance, Marketing, Fundraising and Development.

Established under the sponsorship of Orchard Hill College, a leading specialist further education provider, OHCAT has grown from strong foundations into a confident and well-established Multi-Academy Trust. This relationship has embedded a shared commitment to high-quality provision, specialist expertise, and a deep understanding of how best to support pupils with complex needs.

OHCAT is a unique and values-driven organisation with a clear purpose: to improve the life chances of children, young people and adults with special educational needs and disabilities. Every day, across our schools, and college, we support learners to develop confidence, independence, aspirations, and the skills they need to live fulfilling lives. It is a privilege to be part of an organisation where the impact of our work is so visible and meaningful. Everything we do is underpinned by our mission, our commitment to inclusion and our belief in the power of education to change lives.

At the heart of OHCAT is a strong set of values that shape our culture, guide our decisions, and define how we work together. We are committed to respect, integrity, collaboration, inclusion, and excellence. We believe that every learner deserves the opportunity to thrive, and we recognise that achieving this depends upon having talented, dedicated, and compassionate colleagues who share our commitment to making a difference.

Our values are reflected in the relationships we build with learners and families, the support we provide to one another as colleagues, and our determination to create environments where everyone is respected, valued, and empowered to succeed. We strive to be an organisation where diversity is celebrated, individual strengths are recognised and every member of our community feels a genuine sense of belonging.

As we continue to develop and grow, our people remain our greatest strength. We are ambitious for our learners and equally ambitious for our workforce. We want OHCAT to be an employer of choice: a place where talented professionals can build rewarding careers, develop their expertise and contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

The Chief People Officer is a new position and will play a crucial role in helping us realise that ambition. As a member of the Executive Senior Leadership Team, they will lead the development of a people strategy that reflects our values and supports our organisational objectives. They will champion employee wellbeing, equality, inclusion, and professional development, while ensuring that our workforce is equipped, engaged, and inspired to deliver exceptional outcomes for learners.

This is a pivotal transformational senior leadership role at a time when OHCAT is experiencing substantial organisational change. The organisation is separating governance and leadership responsibilities across the Trust (OHCAT) and the College (OHC), while implementing the revised Executive Senior Leadership Team (ESLT) structure. A strong, positive culture will be critical to the success of this transformation, and the Chief People Officer will play a central role in shaping, driving, and embedding this cultural change across the organisation.

We are seeking an ambitious and experienced HR leader who combines strategic insight with authenticity, emotional intelligence, and a genuine commitment to our mission. The successful candidate will understand that effective people leadership is about creating the conditions in which individuals, teams and organisations can flourish. They will be an influential advisor, a collaborative partner and a visible champion of the culture and values that make OHCAT such a special place to work.

The successful candidate will be a trusted advisor to the Board, Executive Senior Leadership Team and senior leaders, bringing fresh thinking, innovation, and strong leadership to drive

organisational effectiveness and workforce development. The Chief People Officer will work collaboratively with Executive Senior Leadership Team colleagues as an integral member to ensure that learners remain at the heart of decision-making and that OHCAT attracts, develops, and retains a high-performing workforce capable of delivering its strategic objectives.

Above all, they will be passionate about people and inspired by the opportunity to contribute to an organisation whose purpose is both compelling and rewarding. This is an exceptional opportunity to join an organisation that is ambitious for the future, deeply committed to its social purpose and driven by a belief that everyone deserves the opportunity to achieve their potential.

If you are excited by the prospect of helping shape the future of OHCAT and leading a high-performing People function that supports our ambitious vision, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please do contact our advising consultants at Veredus for a confidential conversation and I hope that you find the contents of this pack helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Raymond Leclercq
*Chair,
Orchard Hill College Academy Trust*



Ian Valvona
*Interim Chief Executive Officer,
Orchard Hill College Academy Trust*

2. Orchard Hill College Academy Trust

OHCAT is a substantial specialist Multi-Academy Trust supporting more than 2,000 children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Pupils have a wide range of needs, including autism, speech, language and communication needs, social, emotional and mental health needs, and complex physical and learning disabilities.

The Trust brings together deep specialist expertise across education, care and therapy, enabling multidisciplinary teams to work collaboratively to improve outcomes, expand opportunity and transform life chances. Its model combines strong local school identities with shared expertise, professional networks and integrated central services, providing both consistency at scale and responsiveness to local needs.

With an income of over £125m and more than 1,400 staff, OHCAT has significant organisational scale and reach. As it moves towards standalone governance and executive leadership, the Trust is entering an important new phase, with the opportunity to strengthen its operating model, sharpen its identity and further develop its influence across the SEND sector.

Rising demand for specialist provision, national SEND reform and OHCAT's own ambitions for the future create an exciting opportunity to build on strong foundations and extend the Trust's impact. Its ambition is to be a leading provider of innovative special education, delivering life-changing and life-enhancing outcomes for children and young people.

***Working together to transform lives* is what we do and across the whole organisation we have a range of experts and practitioners who advocate for children and young people with SEND to ensure they receive the best possible opportunities to achieve their full potential.**



3. Our Vision, Mission, Ethos and Values

Our Vision: OHCAT will be a leading provider of innovative special education, delivering life changing and life-enhancing outcomes for children and young people.

Our Mission: OHCAT exists to support, enable and champion the talents, skills and rights of the most complex and vulnerable people in our society in order that we can release their potential, promote their wellbeing and transform their lives.

Our Ethos: As a community of learners, families and colleagues, OHCAT believes that by working collaboratively, with energy and ambition, we can always effect positive change. At the core of our ethos is the conviction that there should be no limit placed on what is possible and that everyone has the ability to be the very best they can be.

Our Values: As an organisation, we adhere to the seven principles of public life to drive our behaviours and provide a framework for our actions: Leadership, Openness, Objectivity, Selflessness, Honesty, Integrity and Accountability.

Within this framework, we have defined our own core values and behaviours based around the word **CREATE**:

Confident
Respectful
Equitable
Advocacy
Team Working
Enabling



4. About the Role

Main Purpose

The Chief People Officer (CPO) will provide visionary, strategic and operational leadership for all people-related activities across Orchard Hill College Academy Trust (OHCAT). As a member of the Executive Senior Leadership Team (ESLT), the postholder will lead the development and delivery of the Trust's Strategy to 2030, ensuring that OHCAT attracts, develops, engages, nurtures and retains exceptional talent while fostering an inclusive, high-performing culture where every colleague can achieve their potential.

The Chief People Officer will champion a people-centred organisational strategy that aligns workforce strategy with organisational priorities, ensuring staff are equipped, supported and motivated to deliver outstanding outcomes for students, young people, families and communities.

The post holder will drive excellence across transformation, talent attraction, talent development, culture and engagement, recognition and reward, and will be expected to model and promote the behaviours that underpin the OHCAT culture, ensuring that values are reflected consistently in leadership practice, decision-making and relationships across the Trust.

This is a transformational leadership role as OHC&AT is undergoing a significant period of structural change – separating governance and leadership across the Trust (OHCAT) and the College (OHC) and embedding the revised ESLT structure. Culture is the foundation on which this transformation must be built, and the CPO is the principal driver. The CPO will act as a trusted advisor to the CEO and Trustees, bringing a commercial mindset, deep relationship intelligence, and an education background to ensure that every people related decision is anchored in the mission to transform lives of learners with SEND.

The Chief People Officer will oversee the ongoing delivery of the Service Level Agreement with Orchard Hill College (OHC) for a continued period of time, ensuring the provision of a high-quality HR service and fostering strong collaborative working relationships between OHCAT and OHC.

Key Relationships

Reporting Relationships:

- Chief Executive Officer (OHCAT)
- Accountable to OHCAT Trust Board and People Committee (with interim accountability to OHC Board during transition period)

Direct Line Reports:

- Director of HR & Culture
- Director of Transformation

Functional Links

- Chief Executive Officer
- Chief Finance & Operations Officer
- Executive Director of Quality & Standards
- Executive Director of Strategy & Partnerships
- Regional Directors of Education.



Key Responsibilities

Values, Behaviours, and Collective Leadership

- Articulate and represent the core mission, ethos, values, and strategic aims of OHCAT, ensuring they underpin all leadership decisions at all times and in the best interests of pupils and students.
- Uphold and model OHCAT's CREATE values and the seven principles of public life: Leadership, Openness, Objectivity, Selflessness, Honesty, Integrity, and Accountability.
- Provide collective leadership around Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety, Data Protection, and Financial Regulations to ensure OHCAT's highest standards are met across all areas of responsibility.
- Contribute to the continuous improvement of OHCAT's core service delivery, working collaboratively with college and academy colleagues to secure strong outcomes for all pupils and students.
- With the ESLT, contribute to the oversight of resource allocation across OHCAT, ensuring value for money against priority outcomes.

Transformational Leadership

- Own and lead organisation-wide transformation as the CPO's primary mandate — culture is not the backdrop to change at OHCAT, it is the engine of it.
- Design and deliver a People & Culture transformation strategy aligned to the Strategy to 2030 and the Target Operating Model, ensuring people decisions accelerate rather than inhibit structural change.
- Conduct a rapid cultural assessment across OHCAT (and OHC during the interim period) — diagnosing current culture, mapping blockers to change, and co-designing a credible and time-bound cultural change plan with the CEO.

- Establish a clear change framework, governance model, and behavioural standards that give transformation coherence and accountability across central teams and schools.
- Act as the senior HR executive sponsor for the ESLT restructure and governance separation programme, working in close partnership with the Transformation Director.
- Hold the pace and rigour of change — reading risk signals early, intervening proactively, and briefing the CEO and Trustees with clarity and commercial honesty.
- Drive measurable improvements in staff engagement, leadership capability, retention, and workforce efficiency as live indicators of cultural health and transformation progress.



Strategic Leadership

- Lead the development, implementation and evaluation of the OHCAT People Strategy.
- Play a pivotal role in driving organisational transformation, ensuring that people strategies are aligned with the Trust's strategic objectives and future ambitions.
- Lead and support change programmes that enhance organisational effectiveness, promote innovation and strengthen workforce capability.
- Build organisational capability through effective workforce planning, nurturing talent across the organisation, creating a culture of continuous learning, leadership development and succession planning to ensure OHCAT and OHC attract, develop and retain high-performing staff.
- Provide expert advice to the CEO, Board and ESLT on people, culture and organisational development matters.
- Advise Trustees on executive remuneration, ESLT appointments, and people governance matters as required.
- Ensure people strategies support sustainable growth across the Trust.

Culture, Values and Employee Engagement

- Champion and embed the Trust's values, ensuring they drive behaviours, decisions and performance expectations throughout OHCAT.
- Demonstrate integrity, professionalism and ethical leadership in all actions.
- Make decisions that reflect the Trust's values and strategic priorities.
- Acts as a visible role model for the behaviours expected across OHCAT.
- Lead initiatives that create a culture of belonging, engagement, inclusion and wellbeing.
- Develop leadership capability so that leaders inspire colleagues, celebrate success and model desired behaviours.

- Develop effective employee listening mechanisms and ensure staff feedback drives continuous improvement.
- Promote positive mental health and wellbeing across the organisation.
- Promote a culture of openness, respect and mutual accountability.
- Build strong and trusting relationships across the Trust and wider sector.

Talent Attraction and Workforce Planning

- Lead strategic workforce planning across OHCAT (and OHC in the interim period), ensuring the right capacity, skills and leadership pipeline for a complex multi-site SEND provision.
- Ensure recruitment practices attract diverse, high-quality candidates for every role.
- Lead workforce planning activities to ensure the Trust has the skills and capacity required for future success.
- Champion equality, diversity and inclusion, maintaining OHCAT's position as a recognised leader in disability employment and inclusive practice.
- Oversee exceptional onboarding programmes that support rapid integration and engagement.



Talent Development and Organisational Development

- Create and maintain development frameworks that enable all employees to achieve their potential.
- Establish clear career pathways and succession planning processes across all staff groups.
- Lead leadership development programmes that empower leaders to nurture and develop high-performing teams.
- Foster professional learning cultures through collaboration, knowledge sharing and communities of practice.
- Ensure robust performance management and appraisal systems support growth, accountability and excellence.

Reward, Recognition and Performance

- Develop reward and recognition strategies that attract, motivate and retain talented colleagues.
- Ensure pay and reward frameworks respond effectively to market conditions and workforce challenges.
- Drive a culture where excellence is recognised and celebrated.
- Develop performance frameworks aligned to Trust priorities and organisational goals.
- Ensure staff have clear objectives and understand their contribution to organisational success.



People Operations and HR Service Excellence

- Lead and develop a large, multi-disciplinary HR function across OHCAT (and OHC during the interim), setting high standards, building team capability, and driving a strategic, customer-focused service ethos.
- Integrate HR Operations, HR Advisory, Payroll, Occupational Health, and Learning & Development into a seamless, efficient people services model, transforming HR from a transactional function into a strategic organisational asset.
- Ensure HR policies, procedures, and frameworks are legally compliant, up to date, and appropriately tailored to the Academy Trust Handbook (DfE Academies) for OHCAT, and the College Financial Handbook (DfE FE) for OHC during the interim period.
- Introduce modern, innovative practice including digital HR, agile workforce models, and systems-led insight to improve service delivery and replace legacy processes.
- Maintain strong, constructive relationships with Trade Unions and staff representative bodies, ensuring transparency and early engagement on all workforce matters.

Wellbeing, Engagement, and Inclusion

- Design and lead a compelling staff engagement and wellbeing strategy responsive to the specific pressures of working in specialist SEND education.
- Embed equity, diversity, and inclusion as lived values across all aspects of the people agenda.
- Establish robust, trusted mechanisms for staff voice, ensuring feedback loops are visible, acted upon, and communicated back.
- Lead on staff mental health and occupational wellbeing, positioning OHCAT as an employer of genuine care and inclusion.

Governance, Risk, and Compliance

- Ensure full HR compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook (DfE Academies) for OHCAT and, during the interim period, the College Financial Handbook (DfE FE) for OHC.
- Lead on employee relations strategy, minimising legal and reputational risk while maintaining fair, consistent, and transparent practice.
- Ensure compliance with employment legislation, KCSIE safeguarding requirements, equality legislation and relevant education sector requirements.
- Provide the Board with clear, Board-ready assurance on people governance, risk exposure, and compliance at each governance cycle.
- Lead workforce risk management and people-related governance activities.
- Present strategic evidence-based reports for People Committee with the Director of HR & Culture, and other relevant Executive Committees, for both OHCAT and OHC committees.
- Ensure robust HR policies, systems and controls are in place and consistently applied.

Performance, Appraisal, Coaching and Development

All post holders within the new structure will be expected to:

- Participate fully in OHCAT's annual appraisal cycle, taking personal ownership of objective-setting, mid-year review and end-of-year assessment, and of agreed development priorities.
- Engage actively with any coaching or professional development support provided by the organisation; such support is offered as a genuine investment in capability and engagement with it is an expectation of the role.
- Participate in 360-degree feedback processes as required, receiving and acting on feedback from peers, direct reports and senior leaders

openly and constructively. Post holders should expect feedback from multiple directions to form part of their overall performance picture.

- Demonstrate progress against both agreed objectives and expected behavioural standards as part of the appraisal cycle, understanding that sustained underperformance in either area will be addressed through the organisation's performance management framework.
- Model a coaching approach to leadership, supporting the appraisal and development of staff within their area of responsibility in a way that is timely, meaningful and aligned to organisational transformation priorities.

Additional

- Job Descriptions are to be reviewed annually.
- The responsibilities listed above are the essentials of the post; it is always open to the postholder to propose ways of extending these responsibilities.
- This job description is not exhaustive, and you may be asked to carry out other duties commensurate with the role.



5. Person Specification

Qualifications

- Educated to degree level or equivalent professional experience.
- Chartered fellow of CIPD Level 7 or equivalent senior HR experience gained at executive level.
- Evidence of sustained continuous professional development.
- Masters degree in HR, organisational development, leadership or related discipline (*Desirable*).
- Executive coaching qualification (*Desirable*).

Experience

- Significant senior leadership experience within a complex multi-site organisation.
- Proven experience of leading organisational people strategies that deliver measurable outcomes.
- Experience of workforce planning, talent management and leadership development.
- Experience of culture transformation and employee engagement initiatives.
- Experience of developing and implementing reward and recognition strategies.
- Track record of leading through organisational change and growth.
- Experience of advising Boards, Trustees or ESLT on strategic workforce matters.
- Experience of fostering high-performing and an inclusive workplace culture.
- Experience within education, public sector, charity or not for profit organisations (*Desirable*).
- Experience within a multi-academy trust or SEND provision (*Desirable*).

Knowledge and Understanding

- Expert knowledge of strategic HR and organisational development.
- Strong understanding of employee engagement and culture development.
- Knowledge of workforce planning, succession management and talent development.
- Strong understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion best practice.
- Knowledge of reward and performance management frameworks.
- Up to date knowledge of UK employment law and people governance.
- Thorough understanding of the Academy Trust Handbook (DfE FE) sufficient to provide interim oversight of OHC HR during the transition period.
- Understanding of wellbeing and mental health strategies in the workplace.
- Knowledge of education sector workforce challenges (*Desirable*).
- Understanding of SEND workforce requirements (*Desirable*).



Skills & Abilities

- Ability to develop and communicate compelling people vision.
- Ability to align workforce strategy and organisational priorities.
- Excellent stakeholder management skills.
- Ability to influence at Board, executive and operational levels.
- Strong negotiation and partnership working skills.
- Ability to develop leaders and build organisational capability.
- Expertise in cultural change and engagement initiatives.
- Ability to interpret complex workforce data and trends.

- Evidence based approach to strategic planning.
- Strong problem solving and decision-making.

Personal Attributes

- Able to work flexibly and travel with own transport to different sites across the OHCAT family as required.
- Committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, and able to model inclusive behaviours and decision-making at all levels.
- High levels of integrity, credibility, self-awareness, discretion, professional judgement.
- Emotionally intelligent, resilient and able to remain calm under pressure.



6. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Orchard Hill College Academy Trust is committed to building a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects and understands the sector we serve. We value and welcome the different ideas, skills, behaviours and experiences of all, and we are committed to creating a respectful and inclusive environment in which everyone feels enabled to participate fully and is valued for the contributions they make. We take all reasonable steps to encourage applications from as diverse a range of people as possible, and all staff have equality of opportunity with regard to support, mentoring, training and career progression.

OHCAT is proud to be a Disability Confident Employer, committed to creating an inclusive and supportive workplace for all. We endeavour to make any necessary reasonable adjustments to the job and the working environment to enable access to employment opportunities for disabled job applicants or continued employment for any employee who develops a disabling condition.

This Job Description and Person Specification is current but will be reviewed on an annual basis and following consultation with you, may be changed to reflect or anticipate changes in job requirements which are commensurate with the job title and grade in line with the Trust's changing needs.

In line with the statutory guidance in Keeping Children Safe in Education, the Trust reserves the right to request and review references prior to interview as part of our safer recruitment process. Any concerns raised will be followed up with the applicant before a recruitment decision is made.

Please click the link to access our Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy: [Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#)



7. Terms of Appointment

Rewards and Benefits

- Pension Scheme – you will be enrolled in the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) offering life cover and financial protection for your family.
- Salary Sacrifice Schemes - Cycle Scheme, Employee Car Lease Scheme and Home Electronics Scheme.
- Employee Wellbeing – We support employee wellbeing with access to counselling, mental health support, generous leave, flexible working, and enhanced parental leave including Employee Assistance Programme, MyGym Discounts, Corporate Eyecare Scheme and Free Virtual GP Appointments.

- Employee Discounts - Blue Light Card, Costco Membership, Discounts for Teachers, and more.
- Other - Season Ticket Loan and Employee Referral Scheme.

For more information, please see: [Employee Benefits – Home](#)

Salary

£125k - £145k depending on experience.

Location

Trust Head Office in Sutton with travel to our other sites.



8. How to Apply

Veredus is acting as an advisor to the Trust, an executive search process is being carried out by Veredus in addition to the public advertisement.

To apply for this post, you will need to submit the following documentation to us by **Friday, 16th October 2026**:

- A full Curriculum Vitae.
- A Covering Letter (maximum of two pages) outlining your motivation for this role, relevant experience and how you meet the criteria of the person specification.
- Should you be shortlisted, you will also be required to complete an Application Form.

Applications should be made via Veredus website www.veredus.co.uk quoting reference number **1382**.

Further Information

Should you wish to discuss the role in strict confidence, please contact Nataliya Starik-Bludova on nataliya.starik-bludova@veredus.co.uk.

Indicative Recruitment Timeline

- **Closing Date:** 16th October 2026
- **Preliminary Interviews:** w/c 26th October 2026
- **Final Interviews:** 25th November 2026

GDPR

At Veredus, we take care to protect the privacy of our candidates and clients. Our privacy notice which can be accessed here: [Veredus | Privacy Policy](#)

Safeguarding Statement

OHCAT is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

The appointment will be subject to an Enhanced Disclosure via the Disclosure and Barring Service.

This post is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and the amendments to the Exceptions Order 1975, 2013 and 2020.

In line with the statutory guidance in Keeping Children Safe in Education, the Trust will request and review references and carry out online searches on shortlisted candidates **prior to interview** as part of our safer recruitment process. Any concerns raised will be followed up with the applicant before a recruitment decision is made.

Disability Confident Statement

OHCAT is proud to be a Disability Confident Employer, committed to creating an inclusive and supportive workplace for all.

The Trust will endeavour to make any necessary reasonable adjustments to the job and the working environment to enable access to employment opportunities for disabled job applicants or continued employment for any employee who develops a disabling condition.