



United Learning
Cambridge Cluster
Part of United Learning

Candidate Briefing Pack Senior Finance Officer

Job Title: Senior Finance Officer
Reporting to: Deputy Executive Business Manager
Pay Scale: Circa £35,000 - £40,000 dependent on experience



Dear Applicant,

Welcome to the Cambridge Cluster of United Learning and thank you for your interest in the Senior Finance Officer role. This position offers an excellent opportunity to contribute to the effective financial management of five schools, each at a different stage in its development.

United Learning is a dynamic and rewarding organisation to work for, with a strong focus on developing people and empowering innovation. Staff at all levels are supported to grow professionally, and their contributions are recognised and valued. We are committed to preserving the distinctive character of each school, while ensuring that United Learning's mission of bringing out the 'Best in Everyone' underpins all that we do. Since joining United Learning in September 2019, our Cluster has continued on a journey of improvement, with each school shaping its own identity, values, and priorities to best serve its local community.

In this role, you will play a key part in supporting the financial operations of the Cluster, ensuring accuracy, compliance, and efficiency in all processes. Working closely with the Deputy and Executive Business Managers, you will help to maintain robust financial systems, support budget monitoring, and provide high-quality financial information to inform decision-making. You will also build positive working relationships with colleagues across the schools, contributing to a culture of strong financial management and accountability.

If you are seeking a rewarding role within a supportive and forward-thinking organisation, with opportunities for professional development, I warmly encourage you to apply. United Learning is an inclusive employer, committed to building and sustaining a diverse workforce. We particularly welcome applications from individuals of minority ethnic backgrounds, alongside all those who share our commitment to excellence.

I encourage you to get in touch if you have any questions before submitting your application, and I very much look forward to hearing from you.



Darren Cooley
Executive Business Manager

About United Learning

United Learning is a group of schools which aims to provide excellent education to children and young people across the country. We seek to improve the life chances of all the children and young people we serve and make it our mission to bring out ‘the best in everyone’ – students, staff, parents and the wider community. We uniquely comprise schools in both the state and the independent sectors. We currently educate over 55,000 students and employ over 9,000 members of staff including over 4,000 teachers.

As a group, we can offer more to both staff and young people than any single school could offer alone. The growing range of outstanding group-wide activities that we can provide will mean that more young people will have truly exceptional and inspiring experiences. We believe that our Group contains the most developed relationships and practical interaction between independent and state schools in the country, creating benefits for all the schools involved.

As part of United Learning, the Cambridge Cluster schools share the objective of bringing out ‘the best in everyone’, enabling each student to become a balanced, happy and articulate person with intellectual freedom, confidence, compassion, integrity and a lifelong love of learning.

To find out more about United Learning, please visit the website: www.unitedlearning.org.uk

Our Ethos

Our approach to education is underpinned by a sense of moral purpose and commitment to doing what is right for children and young people. We believe in supporting our colleagues to achieve excellence and in acting with integrity in all our dealings within and beyond the Group. We believe the safety and welfare of all children and young people is paramount. We summarise this ethos as ‘the best in everyone’.

This ethos underpins our core values:

AMBITION – to achieve the best for ourselves and others;
CONFIDENCE – to have the courage of our convictions and to take risks in the right cause;
CREATIVITY – to imagine possibilities and make them real;
RESPECT – for ourselves and others in all that we do;
ENTHUSIASM – to seek opportunity, find what is good and pursue talents and interests;
DETERMINATION – to overcome obstacles and achieve success.

As a single organisation, we seek to bring together the best of independent and state sectors, respecting both traditions and learning from each. We believe that each of our schools is and should be distinctive – committed to developing its own strengths and identity while sharing our core values to promote service, compassion and generosity.

Continuing Professional Development

We believe that successful organisations make a priority of developing their staff; all the more so in education, where the people of the organisation are its most important asset. While the development of all staff is important, we make support and professional development of senior leaders a particular priority, given the impact that leaders have on the life of staff and students alike.

We believe that schools are at their best when they are autonomous and able to develop a distinctive ethos, reflecting the needs of their students and the context within which they work. The Group can get behind the work of leaders in schools through creating strong networks, providing outstanding educational support and professional development, and by taking the strain of professional functional support. We aim to ensure that the technology, finance, HR and data support is provided more effectively and efficiently than would otherwise be possible, so that leaders can focus on educational leadership.

Our Framework for Excellence

To achieve our mission, our schools priorities five key principles:

‘THE BEST FROM EVERYONE’

Our aim is to bring out ‘the best in everyone’. So, we must expect the best from everyone, all the time. Every child is a special individual, capable of extraordinary things. Who can know the limits of any child’s potential? So, we expect unreasonably – we constantly challenge children to do what they think they can’t, to persist, to work hard and to be at their best.

From every adult we expect the same: that they are at their best, expect unreasonably of themselves, are determined and resilient and pass those expectations on to the children in all they do. We act with the utmost love, care and good faith – the highest standards come with the greatest attention to the wellbeing of all.

‘POWERFUL KNOWLEDGE’

Our most important purpose is to teach young people things they would not learn outside school, which free them to think and act more powerfully in their lives.

Words and numbers are our most powerful ways of representing the world. Mastery of language and fluent mathematical skills are therefore our top priority. We aim to prepare young people to make a success of their lives: a core entitlement to subject- based learning; the development of talents; an understanding of work and society.

Worthwhile learning is often hard. Inspiring teaching is what gives access to difficult concepts and the thrill of intellectual discovery. Powerful knowledge is not static or backward-looking. It includes the ability to critique, challenge the status quo, think and learn.

‘EDUCATION WITH CHARACTER’

Academic success is very important. Exam passes are an important aspect of that. But there is more to a good education. Our schools also aim to develop character, compassion and service. Young people are expected to contribute to their school and to society; to try things which they think they cannot do; to persist in the face of difficulty; to become resilient in overcoming obstacles; to manage themselves; to work independently on things which challenge them; to work with others and in teams; to be courageous and caring; to lead.

We want young people to look back on a joyful schooling which has inspired and challenged them, given them wide opportunity and prepared them for the ups and downs of life.

'LEADERSHIP IN EVERY ROLE'

Our children are leaders of the future. We expect them to start today – taking advantage of structured opportunities to lead and taking responsibility for themselves and others. Every adult in the school is a leader. In every word, tone and gesture, they set direction and expectation. We expect every adult to take responsibility and the initiative to do what is right for the children.

All those in formal leadership positions create the climate in which others work. They demand the highest standards, build a performance culture, develop their teams and create the space for others to lead. All leaders listen, grow relationships, act with integrity and care and expect the best from themselves and others in building a happy, confident school.

'CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT'

However good we are, we can be better. We constantly look for improvements and implement them with pace. We look for ideas for improvement inside the organisation and out; we observe one another; we steal good ideas with pride and look to make them better; we work together to improve.

We always look at the evidence and are rigorous in evaluating impact. We stop or change things which aren't working; we improve things which are. We aim for high leverage: high impact for low effort and low cost. We constantly look to have more impact for less cost and effort and to spend every pound wisely.

About the Cambridge Cluster

The Cluster originated from the federation of Parkside Community College with Coleridge Community College in 2005. After the federation won a competition to build a new secondary school to serve developments on the Southern Fringe of the city in 2007, Trumpington Community College did not eventually open until 2015. These three secondary schools, then a multi-academy trust, went on to support a UTC and a primary school then experiencing difficulties, both of which were subsequently re-named as CAST and The Galfrid and incorporated into the trust, Cambridge Academic Partnership. Board members explored a variety of options for the continued development of the five Cambridge schools and settled upon a transition to United Learning, as a Group with deep expertise and a track record of success. The Cluster joined United Learning in September 2019.

Cambridge Academy for Science and Technology (CAST)

CAST is a growing and successful University Technical College which opened as UTC Cambridge in 2014. Enrolment is now increasing well at Years 9, 10 and 12, with recruitment from across the Eastern Region. The curriculum at CAST is more focused than in our other academies. Science, Maths, and Computing are the focal points of GCSE and A Level study, together with options which bolster scientific understanding, such as Geography and Psychology. Students undertake Challenge days each week, where their learning is extended beyond the standard curriculum, in conjunction with partners such as Babraham Institute and the Medical Research Council. CAST received a Good grading in 2017 and in 2023, has a reputation as one of the country's leading UTCs and is the only one within United

Learning. Danielle Pacey has been Principal since April 2020 having been a senior leader since CAST opened.

Coleridge Community College

Coleridge is a school of nearly 600 learners, with the potential to grow to 750 over time. It is a strong community school with an emphasis on excellent relationships with families and partner primary schools. Coleridge gained its first Good grading from Ofsted in May 2019, a key moment in its development. The school is led by Matt Oughton, Executive Principal, and Coleridge is now going from strength to strength. Key changes in progress include improvements to the curriculum, literacy development and furthering a distinct culture for the school, for instance through the introduction of a House system and frequent high-quality communications with families. Coleridge benefits from a range of excellent facilities and extensive grounds. The school most geographically central to our Cluster, it is also the current home to our Cluster Finance office.

The Galfrid School

The Galfrid is a thriving two-form entry primary school. It is set in extensive grounds and is also the home to two nursery provisions independent of the school. Claire Macfie, the Principal, joined the school in June 2020 having previously been the Head of another very successful United Learning primary school in London. In October 2023, the school was graded Good following an Ofsted inspection and continues to improve on all fronts, focused upon building excellent relationships with families in support of learning. Teaching staff are committed to improving their professional practice, also developing the use of ICT in learning. The school site is currently undergoing a series of improvements.

Parkside Community College

Parkside is situated in the centre of Cambridge, by Parker's Piece. Opening in 1913, it has had a number of guises before becoming a comprehensive school in 1976. The school was graded Outstanding by Ofsted in 2017, a grading it retained when inspected again in April 2023. The school offers 120 places in Years 7- 11 and is consistently oversubscribed. Dee Wallace is the current Principal at Parkside, having previously been Vice Principal since 2020.

Trumpington Community College

Trumpington opened in 2015 and is located in the south of the city in a new purpose-built site with excellent facilities. It sits at the heart of the community it serves, in the centre of the largest residential development seen in Cambridge for many years. The superb sports centre is dedicated to community use outside school hours and is very popular. Links with local primary schools, some of them also newly established, are excellent. Under the leadership of Executive Principal, Matt Oughton, and Associate Principal, Jess Pearce, the school received a Good grading when inspected by Ofsted in November 2023. As the school goes from strength to strength, key priorities include literacy; teaching and learning development; and building the number of first choice applications on the foundation of much increased community confidence.

Employment

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

United Learning's normal support staff terms of conditions of employment apply for the position of Finance Manager for the Cambridge Cluster. The final detailed terms and conditions are subject to agreement between United Learning and the successful candidate and will be reflected in the formal employment contract.

EMPLOYER

United Learning

POSITION

Senior Finance Officer

REPORTING LINE

Deputy Executive Business Manager

LOCATION

You will be based within the Cambridge Cluster and will be required to work at multiple sites within a reasonable travelling distance. This will include regular attendance at the schools within the Cluster and any new schools that may join the Cluster or nearby locations to which the schools may relocate. A Finance Office base is currently located at Coleridge Community College.

START DATE

As soon as possible, by negotiation

STARTING SALARY

£35,000 - £40,000 dependent on experience

HOLIDAYS

You are entitled to take 30 holiday days each year

STAFF BENEFITS

United Learning has a range of employee benefits. We work with Perkbox to offer you over 250 exclusive benefits, accessed through their online platform and mobile app. The platform features a huge range of perks, from discounted cinema tickets and holidays to money off meals out at restaurants and savings on food, gym memberships, technology and clothes shopping. We also offer salary sacrifice schemes such as Cycle to Work which provides tax and NI savings on new bike purchases.

On reaching six months' service, staff are eligible to use the Health Cash Plan provided by Westfield Health. The benefits of this plan include:

- Cash back towards the cost of essential healthcare, such as trips to the dentist and optician. You will also be able to claim money back towards the cost of health screening, vaccinations (including flu and travel vaccinations) and therapy treatments (including physiotherapy, acupuncture, osteopathy, homeopathy and chiropractic treatments).

- Same-day access to virtual GP consultations enabling you to speak to a GP 24/7 – whenever you need them. The GP can issue private prescriptions if necessary, which can be ordered online and sent directly to your home or place of work.
- Specialist consultations and diagnostics, including quick access to MRI, CT and PET scanning services.
- An Employee Assistance Programme that offers access to a counselling and legal information line which is available 24/7 as well as access to up to six structured counselling sessions.
- Access to wider health and wellbeing benefits, including health club concessions/ gym membership discounts at over 3,700 locations across the UK and discounted rewards from hundreds of retailers, restaurants and destinations.

PENSION SCHEME

The postholder is eligible to be a member of the generous Local Government Pension Scheme.

SAFER RECRUITMENT

United Learning is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expects all staff to share this commitment. Offers of employment are made subject to our being satisfied with two professional references, your answers to our medical questionnaire, proof of eligibility to work in the UK, confirmation of your qualifications, the outcome of a Disclosure Process (DBS) and completion of a Disqualification declaration (where appropriate).

If you have any enquiries, please contact hr@parksidecc.org.uk or laura.onyemembenedict@parksidecc.org.uk

Job Description:

Job Title: Senior Finance Officer (Cluster)

Reporting To: Deputy Executive Business Manager (Finance & People Lead)

Location: United Learning Cambridge Cluster (travel across schools as required)

Purpose of the Role:

To provide high-level technical financial leadership across the cluster, ensuring robust financial processes, strong internal controls, and accurate, timely reporting. The Senior Finance Officer will act as the subject matter expert for finance, supporting schools to operate efficiently, remain compliant, and make informed financial decisions.

This role operates at a high level in technical capability, without direct line management responsibility.

Key Responsibilities

1. Technical Financial Leadership

- Act as the lead technical finance specialist across the cluster.
- Provide expert advice and guidance to school leaders and finance staff on financial procedures, regulations, and best practice.
- Ensure consistent application of United Learning financial policies and procedures across all schools.

2. Financial Processes & Controls

- Lead on the design, implementation, and continuous improvement of financial processes and controls.
- Ensure key processes (procurement, purchase ledger, income, payroll liaison, reconciliations) are robust, efficient, and consistently applied.
- Monitor compliance with internal controls and identify areas for improvement.

3. Budgeting, Forecasting & Monitoring

- Support schools with budget monitoring, financial planning, and in-year forecasting.
- Provide detailed financial analysis, including variance analysis and trend identification.
- Work with school leaders to ensure budgets are well-managed and financially sustainable.
- Provide challenge and support where financial performance requires improvement.

4. Audit & Compliance

- Lead on technical preparation for internal and external audits, ensuring all required documentation and evidence is accurate and accessible.
- Support schools in maintaining compliance with:
 - The Academies Trust Handbook

- DfE requirements
- United Learning financial regulations
- Work closely with the Deputy Executive Business Manager to resolve audit findings and strengthen controls.

5. Financial Reporting & Analysis

- Produce accurate and timely financial reports for schools and the cluster.
- Develop and maintain consistent reporting formats across all schools.
- Deliver insightful financial analysis to support strategic and operational decision-making.
- Support month-end and year-end processes as required.

6. Systems, Training & Support

- Act as a finance systems expert, supporting the effective use of financial software across the cluster.
- Provide technical training, guidance, and ongoing support to finance staff in schools.
- Lead on system improvements, upgrades, and implementation of new processes.
- Ensure documentation of processes is clear, up to date, and accessible.

7. Cluster-Wide Financial Improvement

- Identify opportunities for efficiency savings and improved value for money.
- Support standardisation of finance practices across the cluster.
- Contribute to trust-wide finance initiatives and projects.
- Work collaboratively with the Deputy Executive Business Manager to drive continuous improvement.