

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER (CPO)

Reports to: Chief Operating Officer
Executive status: Core Executive
Base: Stratford, London
Location: Trust-wide
Budget managed: circa £300k
Direct reports: HR Business Partners, HR Outsourced service
Indirect reports: HR Administrator

CONTEXT

Compass Eko Trust is a large and complex multi academy trust operating across multiple local authorities and regions. The Trust delivers education and specialist provision through a diverse portfolio of academies and services and operates within a highly regulated public sector accountability framework.

Following merger and continued growth, the Trust is entering a phase of increased scale and complexity. This requires disciplined organisational leadership, strong governance and integrated executive working to ensure educational quality, financial sustainability and organisational resilience across current and future academies.

Executive roles within the Trust therefore operate at organisational rather than functional level, contributing collectively to strategy, performance and public accountability.

The Chief People Officer is a core executive role with Trust-wide accountability for people, culture and workforce strategy across all academies and central services.

JOB PURPOSE

The Chief People Officer operates as the lead architect of the Trust's people and workforce system, holding Trust-wide executive accountability for organisational culture, workforce strategy and long-term people sustainability across a large, complex multi-academy trust.

The role is accountable for designing, owning and continuously improving the frameworks through which the Trust attracts, develops, deploys and retains its workforce. While day-to-day people management is exercised through leaders at all levels, accountability for the coherence, fairness and effectiveness of the workforce system as a whole remains with the post holder. The role is co-lead architect (with the Director of Leadership Development) of the talent and succession system. The role owns the Trust's strategic approach to trade union engagement and collective employee relations.

The CPO operates with significant autonomy and professional judgement, shaping organisational capability and culture to ensure the Trust has the capacity, resilience and leadership required to deliver high-quality outcomes at scale.

DIMENSIONS AND SCOPE

- The Trust operates a complex multi-academy structure currently comprising approximately 28 academies across multiple local authorities and regions, employing approximately 1,350 staff and operating within a highly regulated public accountability framework.
- Executive roles operate with significant professional autonomy and judgement and exercise influence across the whole organisation rather than a single function or service area.
- The role contributes to organisational decision-making affecting educational provision, workforce, finance, infrastructure and risk across current and future academies as the Trust grows in scale and complexity.
- The post holder works within a Trust with an annual income in excess of £70m and material public accountability to regulators, auditors and stakeholders.
- Each executive role holds system-level accountability for the design and effectiveness of organisational frameworks, while delivery is exercised through leaders, specialists and local school teams.

KEY ACCOUNTABILITIES

People and Culture Strategy

- Act as executive owner for people, culture and workforce strategy aligned to Trust priorities.
- Design integrated workforce strategies covering recruitment, retention, succession, reward, employee relations and wellbeing.
- Ensure people strategy translates into coherent, sequenced plans that deliver measurable impact at Trust scale. Own the Trust-wide framework through which individual and team performance expectations are set, reviewed and escalated, ensuring consistent standards of accountability and professional conduct across the organisation
- Define the intended employee experience across the full employment lifecycle, ensuring policies, processes and leadership behaviours align to create a coherent and consistent working environment across the Trust.

Trade Union and Employee Relations Framework

- Act as the Trust's executive lead for the strategic management of relationships with recognised trade unions and professional associations.
- Set the Trust-wide approach to trade union engagement, consultation and negotiation, ensuring relationships are constructive, transparent and aligned to Trust values and statutory obligations.
- Lead on Trust-level consultation and negotiation on matters of collective significance, including organisational change, workforce policy, pay frameworks and conditions of service.
- Ensure a coherent and consistent approach to trade union engagement across all academies, providing clear frameworks and guidance for leaders.
- Work closely with the Co-CEOs, COO and Director of Governance to ensure effective collective consultation, risk management and assurance.
- Act as the escalation point for trade union matters presenting material legal, reputational or workforce risk to the Trust.

Organisational Culture and Change

- Shape and lead organisational culture across a complex multi-school environment.
- Lead large-scale organisational change, including merger integration and policy harmonisation.
- Interpret national policy and workforce trends to ensure proactive organisational response.

Workforce Integration and Risk

- Lead strategic integration of legacy workforces following merger.
- Act as executive owner for workforce harmonisation and people-related risk.
- Provide executive leadership for workforce communication across the Trust, ensuring clarity, engagement and confidence during both organisational change and business as usual activity, aligned to the Trust communications framework.
- Ensure, at executive level, that the Trust operates as a legally compliant employer, with strong safeguarding workforce practices and effective mitigation of significant workforce-related risk.
- Design and oversee the staffing and leadership structures required to enable onboarding schools to operate effectively within the Trust's workforce framework.
- Provide assurance that workforce delivery models and third-party staffing arrangements are structured so the Trust meets its pension employer obligations, including the establishment of compliant admission arrangements where required.

Workforce Assurance and Sustainability

- Owns the Trust's workforce assurance framework, defining the metrics, thresholds and reporting required for trustees and executives to be confident that the organisation has sufficient capacity, capability and stability to deliver its educational priorities
- Works with executive colleagues to ensure that staffing models, leadership capacity and workforce structures remain educationally effective and financially sustainable
- Ensures employee relations across the Trust operate within clear principles that protect organisational culture and minimise escalation to formal process or dispute.
- Develops strategic partnerships with sector bodies, training providers and labour-market partners to strengthen workforce supply, capability development and long-term talent pipelines.
- Evaluates the impact of workforce initiatives and people investment, ensuring activity demonstrably improves organisational performance, workforce stability and employee experience at Trust scale.

HR Function Leadership

- Build and lead a scalable, high-performing HR and People function.
- Set Trust-wide HR standards, frameworks and professional expectations.
- Exercise delegated executive authority over people policy and workforce frameworks.
- Lead, in conjunction with the Chair of the Committee, the Trust's People Committee, a formal sub-committee of the Board.

Executive Leadership and Influence

- Operate as a core member of the executive leadership team.
- Work closely with the Co-CEOs and COO on organisational performance and sustainability.
- Influence leaders and trustees through expert advice and professional challenge.
- Work in collaboration with executive colleagues to ensure strategy and decision making are aligned and do not adversely impact on the work of others and ensure coherence in Trust strategy

Safeguarding

The postholder holds delegated responsibility for ensuring robust safeguarding practice within their remit, including compliance with Keeping Children Safe in Education, safer recruitment requirements and appropriate escalation of concerns.

Additional Duties

Carry out any other reasonable responsibilities commensurate with the grade, responsibilities and professional competence of the post, as directed by the Chief Executive Officer or Trust Board.

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER PERSON SPECIFICATION

Common Executive Requirements

Compass Eko Trust is entering a new phase of development that requires senior leaders to operate with heightened ambition, strategic clarity and discipline. Executive roles within the Trust demand the capability to lead improvement and impact at scale, across multiple schools and diverse communities, while operating effectively within a high-accountability, regulated environment.

All executive leaders are therefore expected to demonstrate the following capabilities and dispositions:

- A self-directed, evidence-informed approach to leadership, grounded in research, reflective practice and continuous improvement.
- Strategic leadership capability that is ambitious, expert and focused on securing high-quality provision and outcomes at scale.
- Ability to lead through others at scale, including setting clear direction, building capacity, strengthening alignment and enabling colleagues to deliver consistently high standards.
- The discipline and determination to translate strategic intent into coherent plans, sustained action and measurable impact.
- Collegiate and collaborative leadership, contributing to collective efficacy and strong cross-Trust working.
- Strong domain expertise, combined with a solution-focused, innovative and future-oriented mindset.
- Ability to interpret, analyse and use complex data to inform high-quality decision-making and performance oversight.
- Ability to read, interpret and respond to local and national policy, ensuring the Trust remains proactive rather than reactive.
- Commitment to a high-support, high-challenge feedback culture, giving and receiving feedback with clarity, professionalism and humility.
- Capacity to build and sustain effective relationships with key stakeholders, partners and sector organisations, enabling learning with and from the best.

Values and Leadership Behaviours

The successful candidate will demonstrate:

- Sound professional judgement, integrity and the courage to provide clear advice, including when that advice may be difficult or unwelcome.
- The ability to combine empathy and respect with clarity, accountability and timely decision-making.

- A commitment to fair, inclusive and transparent People practices.
- The ability to build trust, challenge constructively and sustain effective relationships through disagreement and difficult decisions.
- High personal and professional standards, with a strong service ethic and clear focus on the organisational impact of People work.

Role-Specific Requirements

ESSENTIAL

- Significant senior People leadership experience in a large, complex or multi-site organisation.
- Proven experience of leading an HR or People function.
- Expert knowledge of employment law, employee relations, governance and workforce risk in a regulated environment.
- Proven experience of developing and delivering an organisation-wide People and workforce strategy. aligned to organisational priorities.
- A strong record of leading significant organisational, cultural or workforce change.
- Experience of advising senior colleagues on complex workforce matters and material risk.
- Substantial experience of collective consultation, negotiation and constructive trade union engagement.
- Evidence of improving People systems, services and team capability across a complex or devolved organisation.
- Ability to balance organisational consistency, local leadership autonomy, legal compliance and proportionality.
- Chartered CIPD membership and a relevant postgraduate or Level 7 qualification, or demonstrable equivalent executive-level knowledge and experience.

DESIRABLE

- Experience of working within a multi-academy trust, education system or similarly devolved organisation.
- Experience of merger integration or workforce harmonisation.
- Experience of reward strategy, job evaluation and pay framework development.
- Understanding of education workforce policy, teachers' terms and conditions and support staff employment frameworks.