

TOP TIPS FOR MANAGING YOUR WORKFORCE AS YOU GROW

As your trust grows, you'll want to ensure that your workforce is structured for success.

Laura Lowe (Chartered MCIPD, Head of Colleague Services, Lincoln Anglican Academy Trust), Craig Vincent (Head of HR Consultancy Services and Partner, Stone King) and our very own Tom Kershaw (Senior Market Specialist, IRIS Education) recently shared their challenges, solutions, inspiration, and advice to encourage and guide other MAT leaders.

Our top tips show some of the ways your trusts can prioritise structural organisation, increase efficiency, improve pupil outcomes, and support your staff.



LAURA LOWE



CRAIG VINCENT



TOM KERSHAW

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STANDARDISE YOUR WORKFORCE OPERATIONS

Every school is different, and variances in processes, pay scales, and job descriptions can create an unequal playing field at MAT level. This inequality can creep in gradually and grow to the point where standardising your operations seems like an enormous ask – but it seems equally as unfeasible to continue the way you are.

“There’s lots of reputational risk at stake in this situation. Of course, you need to consider your brand and the type of employer you want to be, but you also need to consider the commercial aspects of being a large, well established trust. Standardisation eventually becomes a necessity, but because of all these aspects it’s important that it’s done in the right way.”

Craig Vincent, Head of HR Consultancy Services and Partner, Stone King

When Lincoln Anglican Academy Trust undertook this process, they decided to complete it during a period of stabilisation, when they knew they weren’t absorbing more schools in the immediate future. This meant they could give it the proper time and attention it deserved. They started with pay scales and job descriptions to create equity among staff, encourage job satisfaction, and promote recruitment and retention.

“We decided 18 months ago we would implement our own trust-wide pay scales. Previously, we were running with 9 or 10 pay scales, which meant certain staff members were being paid slightly differently for the same roles and that clearly wasn’t equitable. We didn’t want to put anyone on a lower paying scale so everyone either stayed on the same salary or moved up. It was a massive job but it was absolutely the right thing to do.”

Laura Lowe, Chartered MCIPD, Head of Colleague Services, Lincoln Anglican Academy Trust

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CREATE LOCALISED HUBS

As large MATs absorb more schools, they often end up covering extensive geographical areas. This can create challenges when it comes to working together collaboratively.

Adopting a hub-and-spoke model allows the central MAT to maintain consistent terms and conditions, while the regional offshoots share people management and development, for example coming together for CPD sessions and resource and facilities sharing.

"Our MAT covers Greater Lincolnshire – that means three different local authorities. We decided to structure our MAT into three hubs made up of the schools that are closer to each other geographically. We'll soon have four hubs and will need to continue to adapt that model as we grow."

Laura Lowe, Chartered MCIPD, Head of Colleague Services, Lincoln Anglican Academy Trust

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PLAN DILIGENTLY TO ENSURE A SMOOTH TUPE PROCESS

As your trust grows, you'll take on new staff and become their new legal employer, often through TUPE. This is an employee's first experience of you as their new employer, so it is important it is a positive one.

"In other sectors lots of HR professionals can go through their entire career and not do any TUPE, work and in the education sector it's something that's become really frequent. The TUPE process can be so intense, and because it's regulation there are legal aspects to that, that override some of the other strategic planning that should happen in terms of organisation development and growing your organisation as an employer."

Craig Vincent, Head of HR Consultancy Services and Partner, Stone King

If you know schools will be joining your trust, start planning early. TUPE is complex and there are particular processes that need to be followed. Ensuring the TUPE process goes smoothly can save hours of time later down the line, improve employee satisfaction and help to avoid reputational damage.

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DEVELOP A TRUST-WIDE CAREER PROGRESSION PLAN

A key advantage for trusts is the broadened opportunity for career development. The DfE's whitepaper 'Opportunity for all', refers to professional development as the golden thread in ensuring an excellent teacher for every child. Trusts should harness this opportunity for wider career progression. This provides opportunities for staff to move between locations to progress their career, without leaving that organisation. This is especially important in today's tough climate where retention and recruitment are a challenge.

Laura addressed how Lincoln Anglican Academy Trust adapted their development pathways with this in mind.

“ We've got some success stories we're really proud of, where we've invested in the training of some of our Assistant Heads and now they've progressed to Headteacher level. This means we can offer career development within the trust and retain staff that we really don't want to lose.

Laura Lowe, Chartered MCIPD, Head of Colleague Services, Lincoln Anglican Academy Trust

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EMBRACE A FLEXIBLE WORKING POLICY

"I think there's an understanding that there are greater barriers in the school sector to flexible working compared to other sectors. However, when we're having such trouble attracting and retaining talented people, especially when we hear that the reasons for leaving the sector include burnout, being open to flexible working can help trusts gain a competitive advantage."

Craig Vincent, Head of HR Consultancy Services and Partner, Stone King

The pandemic forced other sectors to adapt to flexible hybrid working models. However, in the education sector it's nowhere near as simple. Timetabling challenges can create barriers to part time and home working, and there are several stakeholders to consider. Parents, for instance, typically prefer the idea of one teacher dedicated to their child's class. However, with careful consideration around which roles have scope for flexibility, a clear plan for adequate cover and good communication, the benefits can far outweigh the challenges. Trusts who get this right will find it easier to retain and attract new staff.

"Anecdotally, I was probably one of those parents when my child was at primary school. However, it actually really worked for my child having two part time teachers. Stakeholder engagement is really important when introducing measures like these to make sure stakeholders understand the benefits. For example, having teachers that are more rested and energised, who are happier and more fulfilled."

Laura Lowe, Chartered MCIPD, Head of Colleague Services, Lincoln Anglican Academy Trust

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TAKE A PEOPLE CENTRED APPROACH

There are many advantages that can be sought from centralising and standardising processes, and utilising frameworks. But effective workforce management must keep people at its heart. As your MAT grows, you want to ensure you have the best team – minimising reputational risk, retaining happy staff and attracting new talent are all key. Laura and Craig both agree that a people centred approach benefits everyone in the long run.

It was a people strategy. Yes, it's made processing so much easier from a payroll perspective. Recruitment is much more streamlined. But the principle behind it was driven by equity and fairness.

Laura Lowe, Chartered MCIPD, Head of Colleague Services, Lincoln Anglican Academy Trust

"I completely agree, it's about your people strategy and it's a strand that goes through everything".

Craig Vincent, Head of HR Consultancy Services and Partner, Stone King



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WORK WITH YOUR TECH PARTNERS

The process of restructuring your workforce as your MAT grows is a large and often overwhelming task. Working with the right technology partner should support you operationally, financially and ensure your staff can remain focussed on what they do best.

Using technology to support your MATs strategy today and in the future is imperative to maximising your success as you grow. You may choose to take a centralised approach in certain areas, whilst keeping other elements decentralised. For example, a centralised HR platform, hosting consistent policies for all schools in the group is more efficient, encourages best practice and is easier to maintain in line with legislation updates, particularly for larger groups. However, a system gives you the flexibility to manage CPD at a more local level will be favourable to other trusts.

It is likely your trust will evolve over time, and balancing short- and long-term priorities is key. Working with a technology provider as a partner can be incredibly helpful as they can advise and guide on which tools will best enable your MAT to take a people centred approach to trust growth in line with your trusts specific needs and growth plans.

**TO FIND OUT HOW THE RIGHT SOFTWARE WILL
ENSURE YOUR MAT IS STRUCTURED FOR SUCCESS,
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