



GEORGE
WATSON'S
— COLLEGE —

Head of People

Candidate Pack June 2026

LHH

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Welcome from Lisa Kerr, Principal, George Watson's College

People at the heart of educational excellence

Thank you for your interest in the role of Head of People at George Watson's College.

This is a key appointment for our school at an important moment in our development. We are seeking an experienced and capable people leader who will play a central role in ensuring that our people strategy, culture and ways of working continue to support the delivery of an outstanding educational experience for every pupil.

George Watson's College is a school with a proud history, a vibrant present and ambitious plans. We are a complex organisation with colleagues working across a wide range of teaching and professional services functions. Our people are our greatest asset, and attracting, developing, supporting and retaining talented colleagues is essential to our continued success.

As Head of People, you will be responsible for leading and developing the school's people function, ensuring excellence in the fundamentals of HR while also helping to shape and deliver our longer-term strategy. Reporting to the Chief Finance and Operations Officer, you will lead a dedicated team and work closely with senior leaders across the school, providing expert advice, strong business partnering and leadership on matters including culture, wellbeing, employee relations, organisational development, learning and development, and workforce planning.

We are looking for someone who brings strong technical HR expertise, commercial awareness and a proven ability to lead positive change within a complex and partially unionised environment.

You will be comfortable balancing operational excellence with strategic thinking, ensuring the school remains legally compliant while helping us create an environment where colleagues can thrive and perform at their best.

While experience in education is welcome, it is not essential; indeed we have a lot to learn from other sectors. What matters most is your ability to bring credibility, sound judgement and a people-centred approach to leadership. You will be someone who can build strong relationships, cut through unnecessary bureaucracy and help foster an integrated way of working across the school.

This is an opportunity to join a values-led organisation where people are recognised as fundamental to educational excellence. At Watson's, our motto *Ex Corde Caritas* – Love from the Heart – underpins our culture, and we value colleagues who combine professional expertise with a genuine commitment to the people and purpose of the school.

If you are motivated by the opportunity to help shape the future of one of Scotland's leading independent schools, while ensuring our people remain at the heart of everything we do, I very much look forward to hearing from you.

Warmest regards,

Lisa Kerr
Principal
George Watson's College





Advertisement

Head of People, George Watson's College

Location – Edinburgh

Salary – £70,000 - £80,000

Are you an experienced people leader looking for a senior role within a values-led organisation where culture, people and educational excellence go hand in hand?

George Watson's College is seeking a brilliant Head of People to lead and develop the school's people function, ensuring exceptional delivery of HR services while helping to shape the culture, capability and employee experience of one of Scotland's leading independent schools.

Reporting to the Chief Finance and Operations Officer, the Head of People will play a critical role in developing and delivering the school's people strategy, supporting organisational development, strengthening employee engagement and wellbeing, and ensuring the school continues to attract, develop and retain outstanding colleagues.

Leading a dedicated team, you will provide expert advice and support across the full range of people matters, including employee relations, organisational change, learning and development, workforce planning, payroll, HR systems and compliance. You will also act as a trusted adviser to senior leaders, helping to shape strategic decision-making while ensuring the school remains legally compliant and operationally effective.

This role suits a well-rounded professional, ideally with experience of working within a unionised environment. You may come from outside the education sector; what matters most is your ability to combine professional credibility, commercial awareness and strong leadership with a genuine commitment to people in order to drive positive change.

This is an excellent opportunity to join a respected and ambitious organisation at an important stage in its development, in a role that is both highly visible and influential. In return, you will become part of a supportive and purpose-driven community where people are recognised as the foundation of success.

To apply for the post, please send a tailored CV and covering letter to ScotlandExecutive@LHH.com

The covering letter should be no more than two pages of A4 and should summarise your relevant experience, leadership achievements and motivation for applying. If you would like a confidential, informal discussion about the role, please contact LHH on **+44 (0)141 220 6460** or email the above address.



About

Delivering a world-class education within a values-led environment

George Watson's College is one of the country's leading independent schools. Founded in 1741 and located in the heart of Edinburgh, the school educates around 2,300 pupils aged 3 to 18 across its Nursery, Junior and Senior Schools.

Our motto, Ex Corde Caritas – Love from the Heart – sits at the centre of all that we do. It reflects our commitment to academic excellence, personal integrity and a strong sense of service, ensuring that pupils leave Watson's not only well educated, but well prepared to contribute positively to the world around them.

Watson's is a vibrant and diverse community, proud of its traditions and heritage, yet firmly forward-looking. We place a strong emphasis on innovation, inclusivity and ambition, supported by outstanding facilities, extensive enrichment programmes and a broad co-curricular offer. Our size and scale create both opportunity and complexity, requiring professional, well-led operations to support an exceptional educational experience.

As a charitable organisation, George Watson's College is deeply committed to widening access to the education we provide. Through our Foundation Places programme, philanthropic support enables children from a wide range of backgrounds to benefit from a Watson's education, transforming life chances for individuals and families.

The school operates as a sophisticated and multi-faceted organisation, with responsibility for significant estates, financial resources, digital infrastructure and a large, committed workforce. Strong governance, effective financial stewardship and high-quality operational leadership are essential to sustaining our long-term success and enabling future growth.

At Watson's, it is our people who make the school what it is. We are fortunate to have a dedicated and highly professional staff body, supported by an engaged Governing Council and a loyal alumni and parent community (collectively known as Watsonians).



The Role

Creating a culture where people can thrive and perform at their best

The Head of People is a senior leadership role within George Watson's College, responsible for leading the school's people function and ensuring that our people, culture and organisational capability continue to support the delivery of an outstanding educational experience.

Reporting to the Chief Finance and Operations Officer, the postholder will play a central role in shaping and delivering the school's people strategy while ensuring excellence in the day-to-day delivery of HR services. The role requires a balance of strategic leadership and operational expertise, providing trusted advice and support to senior leaders while maintaining high standards of compliance, employee relations and people management across the school.

Key Responsibilities

People Strategy and Organisational Development

- Lead the development and delivery of the school's people strategy, ensuring alignment with the wider strategic objectives of George Watson's College.
- Drive initiatives that strengthen organisational culture, employee engagement, wellbeing and colleague experience.
- Support organisational development and change programmes, helping the school adapt successfully to future challenges and opportunities.
- Champion equality, diversity and inclusion, ensuring EDI principles are embedded throughout the employee lifecycle.

Employee Relations and Business Partnering

- Act as the school's lead adviser on complex employee relations matters, ensuring a fair, consistent and compliant approach.
- Build strong relationships with senior leaders across the school, providing strategic advice and effective business partnering.
- Develop and maintain constructive relationships with recognised trade unions and employee representatives.
- Ensure policies, procedures and practices remain up to date, effective and aligned with employment legislation and best practice.

Learning and Development

- Lead the development of a comprehensive learning and development programme for all staff (including ensuring compliance with GTCS Professional Development standards for teachers).
- Ensure colleagues have access to high-quality development opportunities that support performance, career progression and organisational capability.
- Promote a culture of continuous learning and professional growth across the school.

HR Operations, Systems and Compliance

- Working in partnership with the school's external HR advisory service, ensure the effective delivery of all core HR processes and services, maintaining high standards of accuracy, responsiveness and professionalism.

- Oversee the effective use and ongoing development of the school's HR systems, including iTrent, ensuring robust data management and reporting.
- Maintain compliance with all relevant employment legislation, safeguarding requirements and regulatory obligations.
- Drive continuous improvement in people processes, systems and ways of working, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy while enhancing service quality and efficiency.

Leadership and Stakeholder Engagement

- Lead, develop and support the people team, fostering a high-performing and collaborative environment.
- Contribute as a member of the Watson's Leadership Team, helping to shape organisational priorities and strategic decision-making, and having shared on-call responsibility as required.
- Build strong relationships across the school community and with external partners, ensuring the People function is viewed as a trusted and valued contributor to organisational success.

The Person

A strategic people leader with the credibility to drive change and the expertise to deliver excellence

We are seeking an experienced and accomplished people leader who combines strong technical HR expertise with the ability to influence, challenge and support senior stakeholders.

You will be someone who combines professional expertise with a genuine commitment to the people and purpose of George Watson's College, helping to create the conditions in which colleagues can perform at their best and pupils can flourish.

Essential Experience and Skills

- Significant experience in a senior people leadership role, with responsibility for operational delivery and strategic people initiatives.
- Strong generalist HR expertise, with a thorough understanding of employment law, employee relations and best practice.
- Proven experience of operating within a unionised environment, including building constructive relationships with recognised trade unions and managing complex employee relations issues.
- Experience of delivering people strategies that support organisational objectives and drive positive cultural change.
- Demonstrable success in organisational development, workforce planning, employee engagement and wellbeing.
- A visible, approachable and collaborative leader who builds trust and confidence at all levels, capable of delivering outstanding business partnering that drives organisational performance.
- Experience of leading, developing and motivating teams, creating high-performing and customer-focused functions.

- Confident user of systems and data, with experience of using technology to improve efficiency, insight and decision-making.
- Excellent communication skills, with the ability to handle sensitive matters with professionalism, discretion and sound judgement.
- A commercial and pragmatic mindset, with the ability to solve problems and make balanced decisions that consider organisational priorities, legal requirements and people.
- Resilient and adaptable, with the ability to operate effectively within a complex environment and the confidence to challenge established ways of working to drive continuous improvement.
- Passionate about developing people, strengthening organisational culture and creating positive employee experiences.
- Experience of supporting organisational transformation, cultural change or service redesign initiatives.

Desirable Experience

- Chartered membership/fellowship of the CIPD or an equivalent professional qualification.
- Experience of leading learning and development functions and delivering organisation-wide capability-building programmes.
- Experience of working within a complex organisation with a diverse workforce and multiple stakeholder groups.
- Experience of working within the education, public, charitable or not-for-profit sectors.





Conditions & Remuneration

Salary

£70,000-80,000

Place of Work

Edinburgh

Other Benefits

- Automatic enrolment in the contributory professional services staff defined contribution pension scheme, with enhanced employer contributions
- 40 days' annual leave entitlement
- Membership of the Galleon Club (the school's fitness club)
- Access to a range of other benefits and discounts is available through our Employee Benefits Platform.

Timescales

Closing date for applications:

Midnight Sunday 05 July

Interviews with George Watson's College:

Friday 31 July



How to Apply

If you would like a confidential, informal discussion about the role then please contact LHH on +44 (0)141 220 6460.

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Please note that the covering letter should be no more than two pages of A4 and should summarise your relevant skills and experience and motivations for applying for this role.

If you would like a confidential, informal discussion about the role then please contact Fizza Islam, LHH on **+44 (0)141 220 6460** or email the above address.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is one of George Watson's College's Strategic Priorities. We are constantly reviewing our approach to ensuring equality and diversity in our applications and would be pleased if you could complete an Equalities Monitoring Form.

Should you require any modifications or wish to speak with a member of our team to discuss any particular circumstances, please email the above address.



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