

# JOB DESCRIPTION

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS EXECUTIVE TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**



## ROLE PURPOSE

The Special Projects Executive to the Chief Executive Officer is a fantastic opportunity for a Laidlaw Scholar alum to develop their leadership skills further, learn how high-performing organisations function and directly improve the life trajectory of young people in underserved communities.

The role provides direct exposure to the work of executive leadership in a multi-academy trust, supporting the Chief Executive Officer in turning priorities into action, improving organisational rhythm, strengthening follow-through, and helping connect strategy, governance, communication and delivery.

This is a graduate entry role that does not require previous experience. It is a structured opportunity for a high-potential emerging leader to contribute effectively in a complex public-purpose organisation.

The Laidlaw Scholars Programme is explicitly focused on developing ethical leaders, including through leadership development, research, action, character and capacity-building. This role acts as a bridge between that leadership potential and real-world executive practice in an education trust context.

## ROLE CONTEXT

Laidlaw Schools Trust operates in a complex environment, balancing educational improvement, safeguarding, governance, people leadership, financial stewardship, community trust, brave system innovation and long-term organisational development.

The Chief Executive Officer carries a wide span of responsibility across the Trust. The Special Projects Executive will support the Chief Executive Officer by helping to create clarity, embed programmes and ensure momentum around key priorities.

The postholder will work closely with the Chief Executive Officer, Executive Team, central trust colleagues, academy leaders, trustees and external partners. The role will require discretion, curiosity, professionalism and the ability to operate confidently and at pace in ambiguity, while recognising that this is a learning role with appropriate support and supervision. A growth mindset is critical. The successful candidate will need to learn from the Chief Executive and model best practise.

## KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

### 1. Strategic support to the Chief Executive Officer

Support the Chief Executive Officer in maintaining focus on the Trust's most important priorities.

This may include:

- Preparing briefings, summaries, meeting notes and decision papers.
- Synthesising information from across the Trust into clear, concise insights.
- Supporting preparation for Board, committee, executive and external meetings.
- Helping the Chief Executive Officer track key priorities, commitments and follow-up actions.
- Identifying links, dependencies and risks across different areas of work.
- Supporting the translation of strategic intent into practical next steps.

The postholder will not be expected to make executive decisions on behalf of the Chief Executive Officer, but will support the quality, clarity and flow of decision-making.

### 2. Executive rhythm and organisational follow-through

Help strengthen the operating rhythm around the Chief Executive Officer and Executive Team.

This may include:

- Supporting the planning and co-ordination of key meetings.
- Ensuring agendas are purposeful and aligned to strategic priorities.
- Tracking actions, deadlines and dependencies.
- Helping to reduce duplication, drift or unclear ownership.
- Supporting a disciplined approach to follow-up after meetings.
- Helping maintain visibility of key commitments across the Trust.

The role should help the organisation move from discussion to action, without becoming an administrative-only post.

### **3. Insight, research and analysis**

Use research, evidence and analysis to support strategic thinking.

This may include:

- Undertaking focused research on education, governance, leadership, policy or organisational development.
- Producing concise insight notes for the Chief Executive Officer or Executive Team.
- Analysing information from internal and external sources.
- Helping identify emerging opportunities, risks or areas requiring further attention.
- Bringing a fresh, evidence-informed perspective to organisational challenges.

This element should make strong use of the candidate's Laidlaw Scholar background, particularly their ability to research, challenge, reflect and learn quickly.

### **4. Communication and narrative**

Support clear and coherent communication from the Chief Executive Officer.

This may include:

- Drafting speeches, messages, briefings and internal communications.
- Helping shape narratives around Trust priorities, improvement, culture and values.
- Supporting preparation for stakeholder engagement.
- Ensuring communications are clear, purposeful and audience-appropriate.
- Helping translate complex issues into accessible language.

The postholder should help strengthen the clarity and consistency of executive communication, while ensuring the Chief Executive Officer's voice remains authentic.

## **5. Governance and assurance support**

Support the Chief Executive Officer in engaging effectively with governance and assurance processes.

This may include:

- Preparing or reviewing papers for governance meetings.
- Helping ensure decisions, actions and risks are clearly recorded and followed through.
- Supporting the Chief Executive Officer in responding to trustee or committee requests.
- Identifying where information may need clarification, triangulation or escalation.
- Helping connect governance discussions to Trust priorities and improvement activity.

The role will not replace formal governance, clerkship, compliance or assurance functions, but will help the Chief Executive Officer navigate them effectively.

## **6. Strategic projects and special assignments**

Support selected strategic projects or cross-cutting pieces of work on behalf of the Chief Executive Officer.

This may include:

- Co-ordinating short-term improvement projects.
- Supporting organisational development activity.
- Helping prepare options analysis or recommendations.
- Working with colleagues across the Trust to unblock progress.
- Supporting planning around change, transformation or strategic initiatives.
- Undertaking “deep dive” reviews into specific issues agreed with the Chief Executive Officer.

Projects should be appropriately scoped for a developmental role, with clear sponsorship, boundaries and supervision.

## DEVELOPMENTAL NATURE OF THE ROLE

This role is intentionally designed as a learning-rich position.

The Trust will provide:

- Direct exposure to senior leadership and governance.
- Structured support from the Chief Executive Officer or nominated senior sponsor.
- Opportunities to observe executive decision-making.
- Feedback on written work, judgement, communication and stakeholder engagement.
- Opportunities to lead defined pieces of work within clear boundaries.
- A safe environment to learn how complex organisations operate.

The postholder will be expected to show maturity, humility, discretion and a strong appetite for learning.

## WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Success in this role will mean that:

- The Chief Executive Officer is better supported to focus on the highest-value priorities.
- Executive meetings, decisions and follow-up actions are clearer and more disciplined.
- The Trust benefits from sharper synthesis, better briefings and improved organisational memory.
- Strategic projects have clearer ownership, momentum and visibility.
- Relationships with third parties are built and nurtured
- Communication from the Chief Executive Officer is more coherent and purposeful.
- The postholder develops materially as an ethical, strategic and operational leader.
- The role demonstrates the value of creating structured leadership pathways for Laidlaw Scholars.

## PERSON SPECIFICATION

### Essential

The successful candidate will be able to demonstrate:

- Strong intellectual curiosity and the ability to learn quickly.
- Excellent written communication skills.
- The ability to summarise complex information clearly and accurately.
- Sound judgement, discretion and emotional intelligence.
- Strong organisational skills and attention to detail.
- Confidence working with senior stakeholders.
- A commitment to ethical leadership and public-purpose work.
- The ability to work independently while knowing when to seek guidance.
- Comfort operating in ambiguity and complexity.
- A reflective, improvement-focused mindset.

### Desirable

The following would be helpful but are not essential:

- Experience of leadership activity through the Laidlaw Scholars Programme.
- Experience of research, policy, governance, education or social impact work.
- Familiarity with schools, multi-academy trusts, charities or public service organisations.
- Experience preparing briefings, papers or presentations.
- Experience supporting projects, events or stakeholder engagement.

## KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND BEHAVIOURS TO BE DEVELOPED

This role should help the postholder develop:

- Strategic thinking.
- Systems thinking.
- Executive judgement.
- Governance awareness.
- Organisational design awareness.
- Policy and research translation.
- Stakeholder management.
- Ethical leadership.
- Written briefing and board paper skills.
- Confidence in senior environments.
- Understanding of how educational organisations deliver improvement.

## BOUNDARIES OF THE ROLE

To ensure the role remains appropriate and developmental, the Special Projects Executive will not normally:

- Line manage senior leaders.
- Act as a substitute for the Chief Executive Officer.
- Make executive decisions independently.
- Own statutory governance, safeguarding, finance, human resources or compliance duties.
- Be used primarily as administrative support.
- Be expected to resolve entrenched organisational issues without senior sponsorship.
- Be placed in situations requiring levels of authority or experience beyond the developmental nature of the role.

The role may include practical coordination, preparation and follow through where this directly supports the Chief Executive Officer's effectiveness or enables strategic priorities to move at pace. The role should provide stretch, but not unsupported exposure.

## REPORTING LINE

The postholder will report to the Chief Executive Officer.

A secondary mentor or senior sponsor may also be identified to provide development support, reflection and feedback.

## KEY RELATIONSHIPS

The postholder will work with:

- Chief Executive Officer.
- Executive Team.
- Trustees and governance professionals.
- Academy leaders.
- Central trust teams.
- External partners and stakeholders.
- Laidlaw Foundation contacts, where appropriate.