



GEORGE
WATSON'S
— COLLEGE —

Chief Finance and Operations Officer

Candidate Pack February 2026

LHH



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

A culture combining high expectations with kindness.

Thank you for your interest in the role of Chief Finance and Operations Officer at George Watson's College.

This is a pivotal appointment for our school. As we look to the future, we are seeking an outstanding senior leader who will play a central role in shaping our strategic direction, strengthening our operational foundations and enabling our continued growth and ambition.

George Watson's College is a school with a proud history, a vibrant present and ambitious plans for the years ahead. As the largest single-campus independent school in Europe, we are a complex and dynamic organisation, with a broad range of non-academic functions underpinning the educational experience we offer our pupils every day. This role sits at the heart of that endeavour.

As Chief Finance and Operations Officer, you will bring together responsibility for Finance, HR, Estates, Facilities, Health and Safety, Governance and Technology, ensuring that our systems, structures and resources are robust, sustainable and future-focused. You will work closely with me and with colleagues across the school to translate strategic ambition into operational reality, while maintaining a strong grip on financial performance, risk and compliance. This is a role where you will have the chance to develop and build a fantastic finance and procurement function.

We are looking for someone who combines sound judgement and technical excellence with commercial insight, not least because overseeing our growing enterprise income also sits within the remit of this role. You will be comfortable operating at both strategic and operational levels, confident leading large and diverse teams, and able to navigate complexity with clarity and purpose.

While experience in education may be helpful, it is not essential. What matters most is your ability to lead, to build trust, and to create the conditions in which people and organisations can thrive.

This is a rare opportunity to join a values-led organisation where professional expertise and personal integrity matter deeply. At Watson's, our motto *Ex Corde Caritas* – Love from the Heart – underpins everything we do, and we are proud of a culture that combines high expectations with kindness, ambition with community, and tradition with innovation.

If you are excited by the prospect of making a lasting contribution to one of Europe's leading independent schools, and of playing a defining role in writing its next chapter, I very much hope to hear from you.

Warmest regards,

Lisa Kerr
Principal
George Watson's College





Advertisement

Chief Finance and Operations Officer, George Watson's College.

Location – Edinburgh

Salary –£120,000 - £140,000

George Watson's College is seeking an outstanding Chief Finance and Operations Officer to join its senior leadership team at a pivotal moment in its development.

As the largest single-campus school in Europe, Watson's is a complex, values-led organisation with significant scale, diverse operations and ambitious plans for the future. The Chief Finance and Operations Officer will provide strategic and operational leadership across all non-academic functions, ensuring the school is financially resilient, operationally excellent and well positioned for sustainable growth.

Reporting directly to the Principal, the postholder will have responsibility for Finance, Estates, Facilities, HR, Enterprises, Health and Safety, Governance and Technology. Working closely with the Senior Leadership Team and Governing Council, you will play a central role in shaping strategy, overseeing delivery and enabling the school's long-term success.

We are looking for a commercially-minded, growth-oriented leader who combines strong financial credibility with broad operational experience. You will be comfortable operating at Board level, adept at managing risk and governance, and confident leading large, multidisciplinary teams in a complex environment.

While experience in education may be helpful, it is not essential; we welcome candidates from a wide range of sectors who can bring fresh thinking, sound judgement and a collaborative leadership style.

This is a rare opportunity to make a lasting impact within one of Europe's leading independent schools, in a role that offers genuine influence, challenge and scope. In return, you will join a values-driven organisation with a strong sense of purpose, an engaged community and ambitious plans for the future.

To apply for the post, please send a tailored CV and covering letter to ScotlandExecutive@LHH.com by midnight on **Wednesday March 11, 2026**. The covering letter should be no more than two pages of A4 and should outline your relevant experience, leadership approach 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 the largest single-campus school in Europe and 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 talented young people from a wide range of backgrounds to benefit from a Watson's education, often transforming life chances for individuals and families.

The school operates as a sophisticated and multifaceted 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). Together, we share a clear ambition: to be the making of every child, by delivering a world-class education within a values-led environment, while ensuring the school remains financially sustainable, operationally excellent and strategically confident for generations to come.

The Role

Combining strategic oversight with hands-on leadership.



The Chief Finance and Operations Officer (CFOO) is a pivotal member of the Watson's Leadership Team, providing strategic and operational leadership across the school's non-academic functions and playing a central role in shaping its future direction.

Reporting directly to the Principal, and acting as her deputy, the CFOO is responsible for ensuring that the school is financially sustainable, operationally effective and well governed, while also enabling growth, investment and continuous improvement.

The role combines strategic oversight with hands-on leadership in a large, complex and values-led organisation.

The CFOO will have responsibility for Finance, Estates, Facilities, Enterprises, HR, Health and Safety, Governance and Technology, bringing coherence, discipline and ambition to how these functions operate individually and collectively in support of the school's educational mission.

Strategic Leadership and Financial Stewardship

- Act as a strategic partner to the Principal and Governing Council, contributing to the development and delivery of the school's long-term strategy.
- Provide clear, confident financial leadership, ensuring robust financial planning, modelling and risk management.
- Oversee budgeting, forecasting and longer-term financial planning, supporting informed decision-making and sustainable investment.

- Ensure strong financial governance, internal control and compliance within a charitable and regulated environment.

Operational Leadership and Delivery

- Lead and integrate the school's operations, ensuring they are well run, resilient and aligned to strategic priorities.
- Oversee the effective management of the school's estate and facilities, ensuring they support both current needs and future development.
- Drive operational excellence through clear accountability, strong systems and continuous improvement.
- Ensure health and safety, risk management and compliance arrangements are robust, proportionate and consistently applied.

HR, Culture and Organisation

- Provide visible, values-led leadership to a diverse portfolio of teams, fostering a culture of professionalism, collaboration and high performance.
- Ensure effective organisational structures, workforce planning and HR processes that support delivery and development.
- Work closely with senior colleagues to build leadership capability and operational confidence across the school.

Governance, Risk and Assurance

- Support the Principal in working effectively with the Governing Council and its committees, providing high-quality papers, insight and assurance.

- Lead on organisational risk management, ensuring risks are identified, understood and actively managed.
- Maintain strong relationships with external advisers, auditors and professional partners.
- Act as Clerk to the Governing Council and its Committees, ensuring effective governance processes, high-quality papers, and compliance with statutory obligations.

Growth, Investment and Change

- Bring a commercial mindset to the role, identifying opportunities to strengthen financial performance, resilience and long-term sustainability.
- Lead or support major projects, change programmes and investment initiatives, translating strategy into practical delivery.
- Ensure the School has the operational and financial capacity to respond to future challenges and opportunities.
- Develop and grow ambitious non-fee income streams through commercial use of school assets and partnerships.

Scale and Complexity

- Strategic responsibility for £35m+ turnover.
- Oversight of associated foundations and endowments.
- Financial leadership of major capital programmes.
- Engagement with OSCR and other regulators.

The Person

George Watson's College is seeking an experienced and values-led senior leader who combines strong financial credibility with broad operational leadership and a clear sense of organisational stewardship.

You will bring the judgement, confidence and presence required to operate at the most senior level of a complex organisation, working closely with the Principal, Senior Leadership Team and Governing Council to shape strategy, oversee delivery and enable long-term sustainability.

Leadership Experience and Capability

- A proven track record of operating at senior executive level, with responsibility for finance alongside wider operational, corporate or enabling functions.
- Experience of leading large, multidisciplinary teams and complex portfolios, with clear accountability for performance and delivery.
- A collaborative and engaging leadership style, able to build trust, influence and credibility across diverse professional groups.
- Comfortable working in environments characterised by scale, complexity and competing priorities.
- A recognised accountancy qualification or equivalent senior financial leadership experience.

Financial and Commercial Acumen

- Strong financial leadership credentials, with experience of strategic financial planning, budgeting, forecasting and investment decision-making.
- The ability to apply financial insight pragmatically to support organisational growth, resilience and value for money.

- Experience of operating within a regulated environment, with a strong grasp of governance, risk management and assurance.
- A commercial mindset, able to identify and develop opportunities and balance ambition with financial discipline.

Operational and Organisational Leadership

- Broad operational experience across areas such as Estates, Facilities, HR, Technology, Governance or Transformation.
- A track record of improving systems, processes and organisational effectiveness.
- Experience of leading change, transformation or major projects, translating strategy into practical delivery.
- An appreciation of how strong operations underpin excellent outcomes and organisational reputation.

Personal Attributes

- High levels of integrity, professionalism and personal credibility.
- Confident, calm and resilient, with the ability to make and communicate difficult decisions when required.
- Strategically minded, but comfortable engaging in detail where necessary.
- Strong alignment with the values and ethos of George Watson's College, and a genuine commitment to contributing to a purpose-driven organisation.
- While experience in education may be helpful, it is not essential. We welcome applications from candidates across a range of sectors who can bring fresh perspective, sound judgement and strong leadership to this critical role.





Conditions & Remuneration

Salary

£120,000 - £140,000 per annum

Place of Work

Edinburgh

Other Benefits

- Automatic enrolment in the contributory support staff defined contribution pension scheme
- Reduced school fees at George Watson's College for children of staff
- 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 on Wednesday March 11, 2026.

Interviews with George Watson's College:

Week commencing Monday March 23, 2026.



How to Apply

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

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

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. Our commitment to entrenching, through policy and practice, EDI as a constant in the life of the school underpins everything that we do and is enshrined in our four values: Aim High, Join In, Be Kind, Respect All. 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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