



DUNOTTAR
SCHOOL

Director of *Finance and Operations*

Candidate pack

Welcome

Thank you for your interest in this exciting and pivotal role. I'm looking forward to wishing you a warm personal welcome to Dunottar.

Working together with the support of United Learning and an experienced and expert Board of Governors and over 100 talented, dedicated and friendly teaching and non-teaching staff, we will be shaping the future strategic direction of the School.

We are delighted that you are considering working at Dunottar School. We are a close-knit team where every professional's impact and input is valued. As a rapidly developing school, I am looking for staff who pride themselves on the highest possible professional standards, are keen to immerse themselves in school life and who relish the creativity of the opportunity that is provided here. In return, you will enjoy an exciting and rewarding professional life where you will genuinely feel that you are shaping not just the futures of the pupils we teach, but the school itself. As part of United Learning's family of schools, your professional development opportunities are second to none. Our staff benefit from the expertise that comes from working with other dedicated teachers and staff from a variety of different schools and contexts; so whatever stage of your career you are at, I am confident that you will continue to learn and develop by becoming part of our team.

I hope that this candidate pack will give you a useful insight into life at Dunottar where all our staff aspire for our pupils to not only make sense of the world but also to improve it. I hope you will consider carefully the various points in the job specification but I appreciate that few, if any, of the candidates will tick all of the boxes simultaneously. Our overriding priority is to appoint a highly intelligent candidate who has a strong professional background and the capacity to get up to speed very quickly with those aspects of the role which are less familiar. I look forward to meeting you in due course when you will experience first-hand the buzz and energy of Dunottar and to speak with me, my colleagues and especially our pupils.



Mark Tottman
Headmaster



Welcome

We are looking for an exceptional candidate to lead on all aspects of finance and operations at Dunottar; a vibrant, co-educational independent secondary school in Reigate, Surrey. We have 460 pupils across years 7-13 (ages 11-18) and are part of United Learning's family of schools.

As Director of Finance and Operations, you will contribute directly to our mission to bring out "the best in everyone" through outstanding leadership of those areas and the teams that deliver them. The successful candidate will demonstrate exceptional financial and operational acumen, the ability to think creatively and drive innovation, and the ability to harness the support of the school communities as an inspiring, visionary leader.



Aaron Smith
Director of Finance –
Independent Schools, United Learning

As part of United Learning, Dunottar benefits from central support and expertise. You will be joining a network of dedicated, highly professional colleagues across both our independent schools and academies, who work collaboratively and share a vision of bringing out the best in everyone.

At a time of unprecedented change and challenge for the independent schools sector, this role provides the right leader with a fantastic opportunity to thrive and build their reputation alongside that of the School, with the full support and structure of a leading schools group behind them. If you share our ambition for this role and for the children and young people we serve, we look forward to receiving your application.



Executive Summary

Dunottar is entering an exciting phase of growth, having recently been granted permission to expand our roll to 600 pupils. 2026 is an important milestone in our school's rich history as it marks our Centenary year. At Dunottar our aim is to bring out the best in every pupil, enabling them to be the very best they can be. Pastoral care is at the heart of everything we do, and we pride ourselves on our warm and nurturing, family environment. In addition, we offer an outstanding education to our pupils and, through excellent teaching and high levels of individual support, seek to enable them to achieve added value which is comparable with what is achieved in the top schools in the UK.

We are committed to bringing out the best in everyone by nurturing potential, inspiring subject passion and celebrating talent in all our pupils. Despite the current economic and political challenges, Dunottar is in a strong financial position with a confident future. Inspected in May 2024 the whole school unequivocally met the five key standards of the ISI framework. Whilst single word judgements are no longer used by ISI for ages 11-18, the School received a strong and positive report and is delighted to share it [here](#). Dunottar School is a member of The Society of Heads and the Independent Schools Bursars' Association (ISBA).



Working with United Learning

United Learning is a group of schools which aims to provide excellent education to children and young people across the country. We seek to improve the life chances of all the children and young people we serve and make it our mission to bring out ‘the best in everyone’ – pupils, staff, parents and the wider community.

We uniquely comprise schools in both the state and the independent sectors. We currently educate over 75,000 children and employ almost 12,000 adults. Over the past five years, United Learning has seen significant impact: improving educational outcomes faster than the national average, strengthening school leadership, and deepening our work through our community hubs and teacher training partnerships. As we look ahead, we are preparing to launch our next five-year strategy (2026–2031), which will build on this foundation: continuing to drive excellence in teaching and learning, expanding our social purpose, and ensuring our schools are places where both staff and pupils thrive. As a national group of schools, we believe that Headmasters and their Executive Teams, of which the Director of Finance and Operations (DFO) is a key part, should run schools, and we centralise functions only when that will give a significant gain in efficiency and effectiveness.

We have been able to generate substantial economies of scale in the ‘back-office’ functions of finance, HR and management information, central procurement and specialist estate management, as well as building excellent ‘create once, use many times’ educational and other resources. The Group provides you with a professional network of other DFOs, and the ‘team around the School’ can transfer collective knowledge and skills from the wider Group, meaning that as DFO, you have access to a wide range of expertise and resources. This support has become even more important in the current economic environment. We believe that successful organisations prioritise staff development.

We make support and professional development for DFOs a particular priority, given their demonstrable and positive impact on staff and pupils’ experiences within the School. We work on the basis that each of us, however effective, can always improve.

Leadership, Management and Governance

United Learning consists of two charities which are responsible for the operation of the Group’s schools. United Church Schools Trust (UCST) governs the independent schools, and United Learning Trust (ULT) governs the Group’s academies. United Learning Ltd is the parent charity and owns the independent schools’ land and buildings. The Trustees of UCST hold the ultimate responsibility for the governance of Dunottar, but they delegate certain key roles and responsibilities to the School’s Local Governing Body.

The LGB is responsible for ensuring that Dunottar operates effectively in line with the vision set out by the UCST Trustees. As a senior leader at Dunottar, the DFO will work with the Headmaster, the LGB and other members of the Executive Team to establish and implement the vision and direction for all pupils from Year 7 to Sixth Form. The DFO will play a key part in ensuring that United Learning’s ethos and values are deeply embedded and visible, securing ‘the best in everyone’ for both staff and pupils. The DFO of Dunottar reports to the Headmaster with a dotted line to the Group’s Director of Finance – Independent Schools, both of whom report to the Director of Independent Schools at United Learning, who is responsible to the overarching Group Board through the Chief Executive. The Local Governing Body, and its Chair in particular, act as a ‘critical friend’ to the School.



The Opportunity

This is a unique and exciting opportunity to work alongside the Headmaster with the support of United Learning's resources and expertise to help shape Dunottar's future. The DFO will provide strong strategic, financial and commercial leadership, building operational capacity within the support teams and managing people and resources effectively. The DFO will possess an entrepreneurial spirit to identify and realise commercial opportunities and will provide constructive challenge and support to the Headmaster.

The successful applicant will embrace change and be excited by the idea of putting their stamp on the future of the School. They will bring a proven track record of senior operational leadership and financial control, with strong commercial acumen, strategic planning expertise, and the ability to lead and motivate multi-disciplinary teams. This is a collaborative and multi-faceted role requiring excellent interpersonal skills and the ability to build trusted relationships across the School and local community.

Although prior experience in the education sector is not essential, candidates must be able to demonstrate empathy with independent education, a commitment to the School's and United Learning's ethos and values, and a willingness to play a full part in the life of the school community.

Core Purpose

The DFO has overall responsibility for the financial and operational management of the School, including facilities, grounds, catering, IT and data, and commercial enterprise opportunities, including the effective application and management of resources. The aim is to ensure the smooth running of the School to support the Headmaster and LGB in realising their vision for the School's future.

The DFO is responsible for delivering the financial and commercial strategy to meet the School's long-term objectives and, as a member of the extended Senior Leadership Team, shares in the strategic development of the School, working with senior colleagues, the LGB, and colleagues within the Group. The DFO has overall responsibility for a diverse team of support staff, plus the outsourced catering, cleaning and grounds staff.

The DFO has direct line management responsibilities for the Head of Estates and Facilities, the Finance team, IT Network Manager, Data Manager and the Theatre and AV Manager. The responsibilities outlined overleaf are not exhaustive but are indicative of the requirements of this significant and wide-ranging role.

Key Responsibilities

Strategy and Planning

- Advise the Headmaster, LGB, and the Group on all matters relating to the School's financial strategy and operations.
- Contribute to the development of the School's Strategic and Operational Plan with specific responsibility for developing financial and commercial strategies in support of it.
- Oversee the implementation of the financial and operational elements of the Strategic and Operational Plan in conjunction with the Headmaster.
- Support coordinated strategic development through working with senior leaders across the School.

Leadership and Management

- Lead by example; be an inspiring leader of staff, coach and support them, and facilitate and encourage strong working relationships between the teaching and operational staff.
- Ensure that the School's support teams are effectively staffed and resourced and have the appropriate skills to ensure the optimal functioning of the School, working with the Headmaster to implement structural changes as necessary.
- Manage the performance of direct reports, ensuring that staff receive appropriate support to achieve the expected standards.
- Ensure Group policies and strategies are implemented in relation to the DFO's remit and more widely as a member of the extended Senior Leadership Team.
- Contribute to and support the development of the Group's independent schools, promoting and sharing best practice, lessons learnt, and the review and development of policies, procedures and working practices, to include working collaboratively with peers across United Learning.

IT

- Oversee the development, procurement, delivery and management of the IT infrastructure, data and services to support high-quality teaching and learning and administration.
- Work closely with the central IT teams to manage the safety, security and integrity of the School's IT network, ensuring that it remains secure from attacks and viruses.



Finance

- Manage the financial performance of the School to achieve agreed financial targets, KPIs and operational surpluses.
- Advise the Headmaster and LGB on all matters relating to financial strategy to ensure the long-term sustainability of the School and the impact of their decisions on the School's financial position and commercial matters, including preparing feasibility studies and scenario modelling.
- Ensure that financial resources are deployed effectively and efficiently to support the School's educational aims, vision and ethos.
- Continuously review workforce plans to ensure the efficiency of staffing using curriculum-based financial planning to support decision-making.
- Ownership of all finance functions of the School, including those functions provided onsite or centrally by the Group through the Chief Financial Officer's team.
- Provide the Headmaster, LGB and the Group's Director of Finance – Independent Schools with appropriate, regular and timely information about the School's finances, including the status of the management accounts, commentary on variance reports, and updates to risks and opportunities, including outside usual reporting timescales as circumstances require.
- Prepare an annual budget and five year forecast each year for the School, to include pupil forecasts, all income streams, resourcing, non-employment expenditure and capital investment.
- Prepare business cases to support investment proposals, working with the Group to secure approval.
- Ensure that a robust system of financial policies, procedures and internal controls is in place, both specific to Dunottar and in accordance with the Group's requirements, including fraud prevention.
- Review, check and authorise expenditure and carry out reconciliations in accordance with the internal controls.
- Analyse school fees and costs, including benchmarking, and work with the Headmaster and LGB to recommend fee levels and pricing strategies.
- Advise the Headmaster and LGB on the School's use of fee concessions.
- Oversee the School's bursary application and assessment process and advise the Headmaster and LGB on decisions.

Facilities

- Working in close partnership with the Head of Estates & Facilities, the DFO will:
 - Manage the submission of business cases and capital expenditure requests to the Group's Director of Finance – Independent Schools.
 - Manage all capital building projects across the site, ensuring that such projects are delivered on time, on budget and to the agreed quality, including the tendering process and management of contractors on site, working collaboratively with the Group's Estates Manager – Independent Schools.
 - Develop and maintain an effective, forward-looking master plan that supports the strategic vision in conjunction with the Executive Team, the LGB and the Group's Estates team.
 - Ensure that the rolling programme for building maintenance and school facilities is costed and implemented on time, on budget and to the agreed quality, including the tendering process and management of contractors on site.
 - Ensure that the facilities are well presented, serviceable, safe and compliant with regulations, including health and safety, fire and the Independent School Standards, liaising with expert external consultants as appropriate.
 - Ensure positive relationships are fostered with local residents.
- Manage the catering contract at Dunottar, liaise closely with the Catering Manager to ensure that appropriate standards of catering are provided for students, staff, and hospitality for agreed school events.
- Ensure effective management of school transport and arrangements for vehicular traffic to, from and within the site, including tendering for transport contracts.

Health & Safety

- Working in close partnership with the Head of Estates & Facilities, the DFO will:
 - Ensure there are appropriate arrangements in place, including policies, procedures, equipment, training and funding, to ensure compliance with all health and safety regulations, including those determined by the Group.
 - Promote a positive health and safety culture throughout the School.

Commercial

- Develop and grow commercial activities and business opportunities across the sites to maximise income generation and optimise returns for the benefit of the School, the Group and the community.

Governance, Compliance and Risk Management

- Implement key Group-wide policies and strategies in relation to compliance, finance and IT security.
- Ensure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, ensuring policies and procedures are in place and championing their application throughout the School.
- Identify, assess and manage risk, including management of the risk assessment process and Risk Register.
- Ensure that the School has appropriate insurance cover for all key insurable risks.
- Lead on critical incident planning and lead on business continuity and financial planning to ensure that the School is well prepared for any crisis.
- Liaise with the Clerk to the Governors to ensure the LGB has the information it requires to fulfil its role and responsibilities.

Safeguarding and Welfare of Children

- Dunottar is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. You will undertake your role and responsibilities in accordance with the School's Safeguarding Children and Child Protection Policies and Procedures. The School's Safeguarding Children and Child Protection Policy can be found [here](#).



Person Specification

The successful candidate will bring the following qualifications, experience, skills and knowledge, leadership style and personal attributes.

Qualifications and Experience

- Educated to degree level or equivalent.
- A professional qualification in a business-related discipline (desirable but not essential).
- Demonstrable success in a leadership role in a comparable organisation and through significant periods of development.
- Direct experience at a senior level of both finance strategy and operations.
- Experience of working within a complex budgetary structure, leading efficiency savings and business improvement initiatives.
- Experience of shaping and delivering change.
- An awareness and understanding of estate planning and health and safety.
- Experience in leading and developing colleagues and effective teams.

Skills and Knowledge

- Strong strategic abilities and organisational skills with the capacity to guide whole-organisational development.
- Financial literacy (budgeting, cost management, financial planning, and reporting) with strong analytical skills and the ability to present financial information clearly and concisely.
- Strategic financial management and commercial acumen.
- First-class communication skills – able to balance robustness with constructive, positive discussion and diplomacy with the confidence and personal authority to represent the School with a broad range of stakeholders.
- Strong interpersonal skills and high levels of emotional intelligence, with a proven ability to operate effectively and efficiently in a complex environment while maintaining a sense of humour.
- An understanding of the economic, financial, legal and commercial challenges in the leadership and management of independent charitable schools.
- A clear and analytical thinker – willing to be flexible, solution-focused, and listen to others, as well as take and implement difficult decisions.
- Versatility and ability to manage conflicting deadlines and priorities.
- High levels of accuracy and attention to detail.
- Excellent IT skills and proficiency in MS Office Suite with advanced working knowledge of MS Excel, finance MIS and software packages.





Leadership Style and Personal Attributes

- A highly visible leader who can work both independently and as a key team member, with the ability to delegate and build rapport, empower colleagues and gain the confidence of wider stakeholders.
- A clear understanding of and commitment to the development of the United Learning values and ethos.
- Clarity of vision with the ability to communicate it in a compelling and engaging way.
- An adaptable leadership style which encourages leadership from others and celebrates success.
- A team player and a commitment to collaborative working, both within the School and across the Group.
- An entrepreneurial spirit balanced by a strong appreciation, evaluation and judgment of risk.
- Openness, humility, energy and enthusiasm.
- Sensitivity and wisdom in managing relationships within a school.
- Highly ethical.
- A commitment to the safeguarding of children.
- Determined and resilient, able to remain calm in a crisis.
- Values and promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Appointment Terms

An attractive remuneration package is offered, reflecting the seniority and significance of the position. The salary offered will depend on skills and experience.

This is a full-time, 52-week post, and some flexibility of working hours will be required in light of the role and responsibilities it entails. The main benefits are likely to include:

- Annual holiday entitlement of 30 days plus statutory bank holidays.
- Remission of fees: For your children at UL independent schools (in line with the usual admissions policy) - 33% for first child, 50% for subsequent children.
- Contributory employer's pension scheme.
- Group life assurance.
- Health cash plan after six months.
- Complimentary school lunches in term time.

United Learning values diversity and inclusion and is committed to creating and sustaining a more diverse workforce. We welcome applications from professionals of minority ethnic origin and from majority ethnic professionals who share our commitment to inclusion and diversity. Whether you are an aspiring or experienced Bursar/DFO looking to develop your career within the support and framework of a wider group, we would welcome an application from you. United Learning is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and applicants must be willing to undergo child protection screening appropriate to the post, including checks with past employers, the Disclosure and Barring Service and online searches. This post is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and the amendments to the Exceptions Order 1975, 2013 and 2020.

Application Process

Interested candidates are invited to contact HR with any queries they may have about the role or the requirements: hr@dunottarschool.com or 01737 761 945.

Closing date: Sunday 14 June 2026.

You should submit:

- A completed application form via our [vacancies page](#).
- A covering letter addressed to Mr Aaron Smith, Director of Finance – Independent Schools, and sent to hr@dunottarschool.com. The letter should be a maximum of two pages and should explain your reasons for applying and outline your suitability for the role.

The process is as follows:

Closing date for applications:

- Sifting interviews w/c 15 June 2026.
- Longlist interviews w/c 22 June 2026.
- Shortlist interviews will take place at United Learning, Peterborough or London w/c 29 June 2026.



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Contact Information

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