

Academies pay fair by tackling CEO gender gap

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The academy trust CEO gender pay gap has more than halved after closing for the third year in a row, a study has found.

A Confederation of School Trusts (CST) report, released today, revealed chief executives take home an average of just under £150,000, with those at the top of the biggest MATs paid most.

The research – which analysed 126 academy chains – found CEO salaries had risen by 4 per cent – which outstripped increases handed to all other senior staff.

This comes after *Schools Week's* annual CEO pay investigation revealed the wage gap between those running academy chains and their next-in-command had widened by up to £65,000. Our audit included 1,800 trusts, making it the largest-ever analysis.

CST boss Leora Cruddas said: "The evidence

is that trusts and their boards are taking their responsibilities seriously."

CST's report shows the "median basic salary for CEOs [has] increased by 4 per cent" to £149,790. Cruddas noted this was "in line" with the settlement for most teaching staff.

But she added their earnings are "below the top of the statutory pay range for maintained school leadership, which goes up to £153,490" in inner London.

This is "despite the wider responsibilities that frequently go with the [chief executive] role compared to that of a headteacher".

On average, other senior trust staff were given rises of 3.4 per cent.

The median salaries of CEOs in the smallest trusts – those with up to five schools – is £137,352. Those in the largest MATs are paid £173,532.

The report also said women chief executives earned, on average, £5,087 less than men, down from £8,634 last year. The gap has fallen each year



since 2023, more than halving over the period to 3.4 per cent.

Unsurprisingly, London CEOs are paid the most (£164,851). Their earnings are "14.9 per cent higher than the median salary for the rest of the UK".

Similar roles in the private sector are paid around £376,000. Meanwhile, CEOs of other public services and charities receive, on average, £161,865 and £147,621 respectively.

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Officials kept mum about probe as merger decided

A probe into the academy trust that paid nearly £5,000 in "consultancy services" to its CEO's mum was kept under wraps while officials ruled on its merger.

The revelation has reopened the debate around the transparency of important academy decisions. These are made in behind-closed-doors regional advisory board meetings, attended only by senior government officials and school leaders.

The Department for Education stressed information about its "live investigations are confidential", but education adviser and former trust CEO Frank Norris argued the decision to withhold the information about Heart Education Trust was a "mistake".

He said: "I understand the desire to resolve these matters quickly, but just allowing time for the investigation to be completed would have allowed the regional board [to have] the full range of evidence."

"That would have meant the decision that was ultimately made in the longer term is more likely to be a securer decision."

An investigation 'outcome' report, published earlier this month, revealed 29 breaches of academy rules had been uncovered at the Heart Education Trust last year.

The four-school MAT "entered into four related-party transactions totalling £4,747 with a former senior staff member without proper policies, contracts or adequate value for money assessments".

The report said these weren't disclosed in annual accounts or to the Education and Skills Funding Agency, as required.

Heart's most recent accounts – for 2023-24 – show rules covering "related-party transactions were not adhered to in relation to transactions totalling £1,790". The payments were made to the trust's founding chief executive Christina Kenna for "consultancy services and other support".

She is the mother of Hazel Cabbage, who succeeded her as Heart CEO in 2022. Cabbage did not provide a comment in relation to the government findings.

The report said that, alongside the

investigation, DfE's "regions group led its own intervention with the trust", which resulted in Heart's schools transferring to the Unity Schools Partnership in September 2024.

The department's advisory board for the east of England met in April the same year to discuss the move. DfE guidance states members, who are usually trust leaders, "help inform" government judgements but "are not decision makers".

Notes from the meeting make no mention of the probe. Norris said it "looks as though some of this information has been withheld because of a desire to move things on quickly".

The DfE said its "live investigations are confidential". This is to "protect" the probe's "integrity", ensure "a fair and due process is followed and to protect individuals involved".

It added: "Confidential matters would not be discussed in an open forum and would not be reported in notes publicly available. [Advisory board] notes are not intended to be minutes of the meeting."