



Candidate Information

Appointment of Chief Operating Officer

Ref: FBSLA

February 2025



WELCOME FROM THE HEAD



Welcome to ISA - “a kind and inclusive community of reflective global citizens in Northeast Scotland”. I am Nick Little, Head of School since August 2018. Before that I was Head for four years and worked for a total of 16 years in a three-programme International Baccalaureate (IB) school near Shanghai, China. I started my teaching career in state schools in England, where I am originally from.

Although I was educated and first taught in a national system, I am committed to international education: my three children went through the IB’s primary years, middle years and diploma programmes. They all now live and work in multicultural London where the benefits of an education with a broad perspective is evident every day. At ISA, we say we educate global citizens - I know what that looks like from first hand experience!

I am proud to work as part of a first-rate Leadership Team which includes the Principals, the Social and Emotional Counsellor, the IT Director as well as the Chief Operating Officer. Our backgrounds are Scottish, English and American, with a mix of work experiences from ‘just in this area’ to ‘right across the world’. We share a set of values, but have very different perspectives, and have found open discussion leads to creative and coherent solutions.

The History of ISA

We were founded in 1972 as the American School of Aberdeen, by an Englishman who had two schools south of the border. North Sea oil had just been discovered, and US companies, experienced in the Gulf of Mexico, were leading further exploration.

The oil and gas industry continued to expand through the decade; and in 1979 a conglomeration of energy companies bought the school, establishing it as a not-for-profit charity through an ownership company called Paloak. In return 'Paloak' students have priority admission for an education the local system cannot provide.

By the 1990s our student population had diversified so much that a purely American education wasn't enough. In 1997, we adopted the IB Diploma as our university entrance qualification and changed our name to 'International School Aberdeen.'

We were still a largely expatriate school when we moved to our new, purpose-built site in 2010. At that time, numbers of students sponsored by the big corporations were expanding so quickly that within five years we needed to build a multi-million pound extension - which was fully funded by Paloak companies.

Within a year of completing our new block our student population was rocked by the 2015 oil price crash. For the first time, we started actively recruiting in the local market. From fewer than 10% of our students being UK citizens, by 2020 they constituted just over 50% - where they have pretty much remained since then.

In the last ten years, our number of corporate sponsored students has continued to decline, but this has been more than outpaced by a rise in self-pays.





ISA Currently

Our student population is currently 492, divided into the Nursery (27), Elementary School (169), Middle School (136) and High School (160). These students come from 46 different passport countries: the six largest being - UK (51%) US (9%) Nigeria (3%), Italy (3%), France (2%), and Canada 2%). Within the school students are more likely to be UK citizens within High School (60%) and Middle School (57%) than Upper Elementary (45%) or Lower Elementary (38%).

Most of our students live in the same postcode as the school (42%) or adjacent ones. 8% commute from the nearby town of Banchory. Fewer students come from the city centre where there are three other independent schools - St Margarets, Albyn, and Robert Gordon College. Lathallan in the south of the county is also competition.

Over the last 10 years, our source of funding has changed from mostly corporate (whose fees are 1.8 times higher - 28%) to mostly non-corporate (45%); 10% of students receive financial aid; 9% are staff children.

Governance, Leadership & Staff Body

ISA is governed by a voluntary Board of nine Trustees. Three of these are appointed by a Paloak company, three are parent elected and three are Board appointed. All three of the Board Chair's children have attended ISA, and he has been on the Board for 8 years.

Full Board meetings are held bi-monthly; the Head of School and Chief Operations Officer attending ex-officio; in the months in between are Finance Committee meetings, which also involve the Head and the COO.

The school's Leadership Team meets weekly and consists of: the Head of School, the Principals, the Chief Operations Officer, the Assistant Principals, the Head of Preschool (nursery), the IT Director, the IB Coordinator and the Social and Emotional Counsellor.

There are 60 full time equivalent teachers, 6 early years practitioners, 3 teaching assistants; as well as 10 full time equivalent clerical support and 19 FTE facilities staff. The average tenure of teaching staff is coming up to 8 years: we don't struggle to recruit or retain. We are a first-rate working environment.



The Road Ahead

In August 2024, ISA began its latest five-year plan. During the previous one we faced challenges such as falling corporate numbers, the introduction of business rates and the pandemic: nevertheless, our student numbers rose and we enjoyed healthy surpluses.

In the next five years, we expect corporate numbers to continue to decline and the introduction of VAT to cause concerns for price sensitive parents. We also expect to strengthen in our existing market and develop new ones. We have established a clear, child-centred identity, distinct from other independent schools in the area, and attractive to a broad demographic. We want to ensure we deliver what we say we are, and effectively communicate that in a targeted way.

We are looking to extend our market in a number of ways: expatriate boarding being the most bold, but we have also made steps towards making ourselves a training centre. We will also look to develop funding through alumni relationships and company sponsorships.

Working Within a Team

We are a small school and a key aptitude for an incoming senior member of staff is the ability to collaborate effectively: knowing how to advocate, and to listen, to challenge and be challenged. Our roles are wide, but because we support each other, we can maximise our strengths and mitigate where we are less confident. Because we share values and a sense of mission, but differ in perspectives and experiences, we have high trust, creative discussions. Our habits of open communication allow individual initiative to enhance rather than compromise the coherence of the whole.

THE ROLE

Reporting to the Head of School, the Chief Operating Officer provides leadership and direction to staff within the Operations team. The post holder will work closely with the Head of School, Senior Leadership Team and the School Board of Trustees to:

- Play a key role in the business planning process, organisational governance and legal compliance
- Provide effective leadership and management of the school's finance, facilities, HR, HSE, admissions and business support functions
- Ensure robust financial management and strategy
- Act in the role of Company Secretary for the school Board of Trustees
- Actively contribute to the development and leadership of the school

Key responsibilities will include the requirement to:

Finance

- Act as the school's formal finance director and provide strategic leadership of all aspects of the finance function. Provide financial advice to the Board of Trustees, committees, Head of School and Senior Leadership Team
- Lead planning, financial forecasting and modelling, budget-setting, spending and revenue reporting
- Ensure effective monitoring of income and expenditure in relation to budget and present regular management reports to budget holders, the Leadership Team and the Board of Trustees.
- Liaise with external auditors and oversee the annual audit process
- Maintain cash flow projections for the current and future years
- Advise on investments in consultation with the school's investment managers
- Ensure the correct preparation of student fee invoices and the collection of monies
- Ensure the correct payment of all salaries and wages, including PAYE, Pension and National Insurance Contributions and compliance with regulations for benefits in kind
- Advise on financial assistance and bursary awards and undertaking assessments of parents' income and assets to assess eligibility for financial assistance
- Ensure that the school has adequate insurance cover at all times, to include employer's liability, buildings and equipment cover, personal accident, travel insurance and other relevant cover
- Ensure best value in school contracts and expenditure by robust contract management and purchase ordering processes

Facilities Management

- Work with the Head of School, Facilities Manager and Compliance Officer to ensure a healthy and safe work and learning environment
- Oversee the Facilities Manager in ensuring the effective administration of the school campus and resources
- Work with the Head of School and the Facilities Manager to ensure all possible efficiencies

Admissions and Business Development

- Work with the Head of School to develop, implement and monitor a business strategy to improve student admissions and income from other sources
- Play an active role in the marketing and development of the school
- Oversee the school's admission teams, business office team, school administrators, transport coordinator, and school nurse, providing effective leadership and support.
- Ensure robust business processes are in place to support the admissions and business support functions





HR

- Work with the Head of School to ensure a positive workplace culture, with the expectation that all ISA employees display and are treated according to ISA values
- Ensure compliance with all relevant aspects of employment law including employment protection, equal pay, minimum wage, working time directive or discrimination on the grounds of sex, race or disability
- Act as the Head of School's adviser on employment matters including disciplinary procedures and ensure that the school has appropriate disciplinary and grievance procedures
- Ensure that all relevant staff have contracts of employment and keep the school's standard contracts up-to-date as new legislation takes effect
- Manage the employment, and terms and conditions of service of all staff
- Ensure that resources are allocated to the development and implementation of an HR strategy that supports organisational improvement

Corporate Governance

- Ensure that the School Board is appropriately constituted, that new Board members receive a robust and timely induction to the organisation, and that the Chair, Board and its sub-committees are supported effectively
- Act as secretary to the Board of Trustees and ensure accurate timely reports and minutes of meetings
- Ensure compliance with all aspects of company law and good governance, ensuring timely reporting to Companies House and OSCR on statutory updates and returns

All ISA employees are expected to support the school's identity as "kind and inclusive" and its mission to provide "a broad high-quality education", developing "the personal wellbeing and academic abilities" of every student. They should work in a professional and collegiate way to support the school's guiding statements and exemplify its values.



PERSON SPECIFICATION

The successful candidate will have the following characteristics:

Experience

- A proven track record of outstanding leadership with evidence of successfully developing, managing, and facilitating change through effective management
- A high level of proven commercial acumen
- Strong financial awareness and the ability to balance the delivery of programmes against the realities of a budget
- Experience of engaging and building relationships with key internal and external stakeholders
- Demonstrable experience of successfully developing, implementing and monitoring strategic plans

Skills and Attributes

- Strategic thinker with strong analytical skills
- A strong understanding of the current and future economic, political and societal challenges facing the independent school sector, with an innovative approach to dealing with these challenges successfully
- Highly efficient time management and organisational skills
- Emotional intelligence, a sense of humour and empathy
- Ability to influence change and steer new ways of working
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Excellent communication skills (both written and verbal)
- Personal resilience and the ability to help others develop it
- Excellent decision making and problem-solving skills
- A passion for working in education and educational issues



TERMS OF APPOINTMENT

A competitive salary will be offered for this role, depending on the skills and experience of the successful candidate.

HOW TO APPLY

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to the International School Aberdeen on this appointment. Candidates should apply for this role through our website at www.saxbam.com/appointments using code FBSAA. Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and cover letter and complete the online equal opportunities monitoring* form.

The closing date for applications is midday on Friday 7th March 2025.

* The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete as part of the application process.

GDPR personal data notice

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.

Due diligence

Due diligence will be carried out as part of the application process, which may include searches carried out via internet search engines and any public social media accounts.

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