

Recruitment Pack

Growing the Top Facilitator 2026



challengepartners.org

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About Challenge Partners

Challenge Partners is a national partnership of schools and trusts who believe the best way to reduce educational inequality and enhance the life chances of children is through collaboration, challenge and leadership development. We work together to ensure every school community can benefit from the combined wisdom of the education system.

Our national partnership currently reaches more than 420,000 pupils in over 480 schools and 131 trusts across the country. All fervently believe that working together is the best way to reduce educational inequality and increase the life chances of all children.

School leadership plays a significant role in pupil outcomes, and our practitioner-led programmes and networks offer unique continuing professional development (CPD) for leaders at all levels - from classroom teachers to CEOs.

And our approach works; pupils in our schools consistently achieve more and progress faster than national averages, despite serving a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils. Inspection and peer review outcomes demonstrate how long-term participation in Challenge Partners leads to sustained improvements over time.

By rapidly sharing innovative practices across the country, we ensure that the most effective support reaches the children who need it most.

You can read our 5-year strategy [here](#) and our latest impact report [here](#).

Mission and Values

Our mission is to reduce educational inequality and improve the life chances of all children. Through collaboration, challenge and professional development, we are working to ensure every school community can benefit from the combined wisdom of the education system.

We were founded by practitioners and their leadership is built into our constitution. This keeps us at the cutting edge and enables us to meet the real needs and aspirations of schools and trusts, while keeping excellent practitioners where they should be – in classrooms, schools and trusts.

The Challenge Partners' values underpin everything we do:

- **Excellence:** We are always looking for ways to improve because we are determined to achieve the best for every child, staff member, teacher and leader
- **Equity:** We treat each other fairly, with trust, care and respect. We seek the best for every child, and know that those who have the least need our combined expertise the most

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- **Courageous Leadership:** We speak up and take responsibility for all children, making sure that we do not harm others in doing our best for our own schools
- **Challenge:** We expect the best of ourselves and each other, and value challenge which helps us improve
- **Collaboration:** We listen to, share with and learn from each other, developing our practice together so that every child benefits from our combined wisdom and creativity
- **Innovation:** We use and generate research, we innovate with discipline and evaluate intelligently in pursuit of better outcomes for all children, especially the most disadvantaged



About Growing the Top

Growing the Top is a school improvement programme for strong schools to consistently sustain and extend their excellence. It features:

- **Expert matching:** creating trusting and supportive groups of schools to provide mutual support and challenge, exchange knowledge, and build strong, lasting partnerships.
- **Facilitated school visits:** visiting leaders explore the strengths and knotty issues of the host school, creating an opportunity to collaborate and co-create ideas and solutions.
- **External stimulus from other sectors:** gaining knowledge external to the UK education sector (a distinguishing feature of the programme).
- **Leadership development:** through observation of other strong schools.
- **Development of social capital:** between strong schools.

Schools will be matched in groups of three to four, each supported by a dedicated Facilitator. Over the academic year, each school will host an in-school visit day involving the headteacher and a senior leader from each school in the group. During each visit, the host school will share an Area of Systemic Leading Practice and its learning journey to date, while also seeking peer support on a current systemic challenge.

What makes this opportunity exceptional?

1. **Bespoke Training and Professional Development:** You will be trained in Challenge Partners' powerful facilitation for knowledge exchange methodology, highly rated by trainees who tell us it supports their practice in their other roles and settings. You will receive ongoing support as a new Facilitator, where a member of the central team may join a visit day and agree on any specific areas of focus with you and how you would like to receive feedback. Professional insights gathered on visit days will also inspire fresh ideas for your own professional setting and practice.
2. **Exclusive Networking:** Join a powerful community of practitioners from diverse backgrounds and settings across the country. Connect with passionate professionals throughout the programme and across Challenge Partners' Network of Excellence, fostering lasting collaborations.
3. **Financial Support:** Receive a stipend for your school in recognition of your time commitment, as well as travel expenses for attending visit days. Please note, this is not a salaried position.

“Challenge Partners training was of the highest quality and so tightly linked to the whole project's developmental aims. I felt like I learned a huge amount, in a very short time.”

“Having completed the original training several years ago, it was nice to revisit the key learning points ahead of this year's facilitation. It's always good to take time out of a busy school schedule and to reflect upon and refine a skill that can be used in many scenarios and not just the Growing the Top programme.”

Growing the Top Facilitator

Stipend: Receive a stipend for your school, plus reimbursement of reasonable travel expenses for visit days in line with our expenses policy.

Contract: October 2026 to July 2027 (academic year).

Start Date: 1st October 2026 at the Facilitator training day.

Travel Requirements: Growing the Top is a national programme. Travel to different parts of the country and occasional overnight stays will be required for visit days. You will also be required to attend two in-person events in London.

About the Role

As a Facilitator on the programme, you play a pivotal role in creating the social capital and learning environment for high quality knowledge exchange. This enables the sharing of best practice between schools and effectively encourages deeper discussion and challenge.

Key Responsibilities

- Attend the dedicated Facilitator Training Day (1 October 2026) and the in-person launch event (12 November 2026) to build the knowledge, skills and social capital needed to facilitate a school trio/quad and support them throughout the programme.
- Prepare for visit days by:
 - Openly and clearly communicate with the programme participants;
 - Conduct a planning call with the host school to develop an agenda for the day;
 - Quality assure the agenda before sharing this with the group.
- Facilitate a positive dialogue between the host school and visiting leaders and encouraging an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect throughout the process, enabling senior leaders to feel open to challenge.
- Promote the professional development of visiting headteachers and senior leaders.
- Provide participant feedback to Challenge Partners after visit days.
- Attend the final in-person wrap up event to reflect on learnings and connect as a cohort (23 June 2027).

Person Specification

- Must have participated in Growing the Top or Extending Leading Practice within the last three academic years.
- An experienced senior leader with a track record of delivering excellent outcomes for pupils.
- Experience of school improvement work and collaborative work across multiple schools, with an understanding of systemic school improvement.
- Ability to clearly articulate what leading practice looks like in a school setting.

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- Ability to quickly gain confidence and trust as a leader of senior colleagues.
- Outstanding written and oral communication skills.
- Excellent organisation skills.
- Experience of coaching and developing peers.
- Ability to facilitate meetings to bring together a range of opinions and evidence in order to agree conclusions.
- Professional integrity and willingness to act as an ambassador for Challenge Partners.
- A willingness to learn, give and receive feedback, and adapt to Challenge Partners' style.
- Valid and clean enhanced DBS certificate.

Application and induction process

1. Complete the expression of interest form [HERE](#) by **10 am on Friday 10 April 2026**.
2. A briefing call with the central team will take place on either **Wednesday 29 or Thursday 30 April 2026, virtually**.
3. Completion of initial one day training (1st October 2026 - London).
4. Being placed with a trio/quad after the Challenge Partners matching process. Placement is subject to demand on our programmes and is not guaranteed.

A note on AI

At Challenge Partners, we are committed to a fair and inclusive recruitment process. We don't use Artificial Intelligence (AI) for recruitment - applications are reviewed by members of the team and we use blind shortlisting to mitigate potential bias and ensure all candidates are considered on merit.

Whilst we recognise that AI can be a useful tool for tasks like proofreading, we encourage you to share genuine examples from your own experience so we can better understand your unique skills and perspective. Authenticity is important to us and we want to hear your voice throughout the application process.

Our commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

At Challenge Partners, we are committed to strengthening diversity, equity and inclusion across our partnership. As part of this commitment, we are actively seeking to diversify our pool of Facilitators to better reflect the schools and communities we serve.

We welcome applications from all suitably qualified individuals, regardless of race, gender, sex, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or age. We particularly encourage applications from underrepresented groups, as we recognise the value that diverse lived experiences and perspectives bring to peer challenge, collaboration and system leadership.

Our approach to recruitment is grounded in fairness, transparency and inclusion, and we are committed to creating an environment in which all partners feel valued, supported and able to thrive.

Safeguarding

Challenge Partners is committed to safeguarding children, beneficiaries and staff and to taking reasonable steps to protect all those who come into contact with our activities from harm.

All representatives of our organisation (this includes our Trustees, staff, contractors, volunteers, and all others) are required to uphold Challenge Partners' [code of conduct](#) and [safeguarding policy](#).

All offers of employment and voluntary positions will be subject to satisfactory background checks.