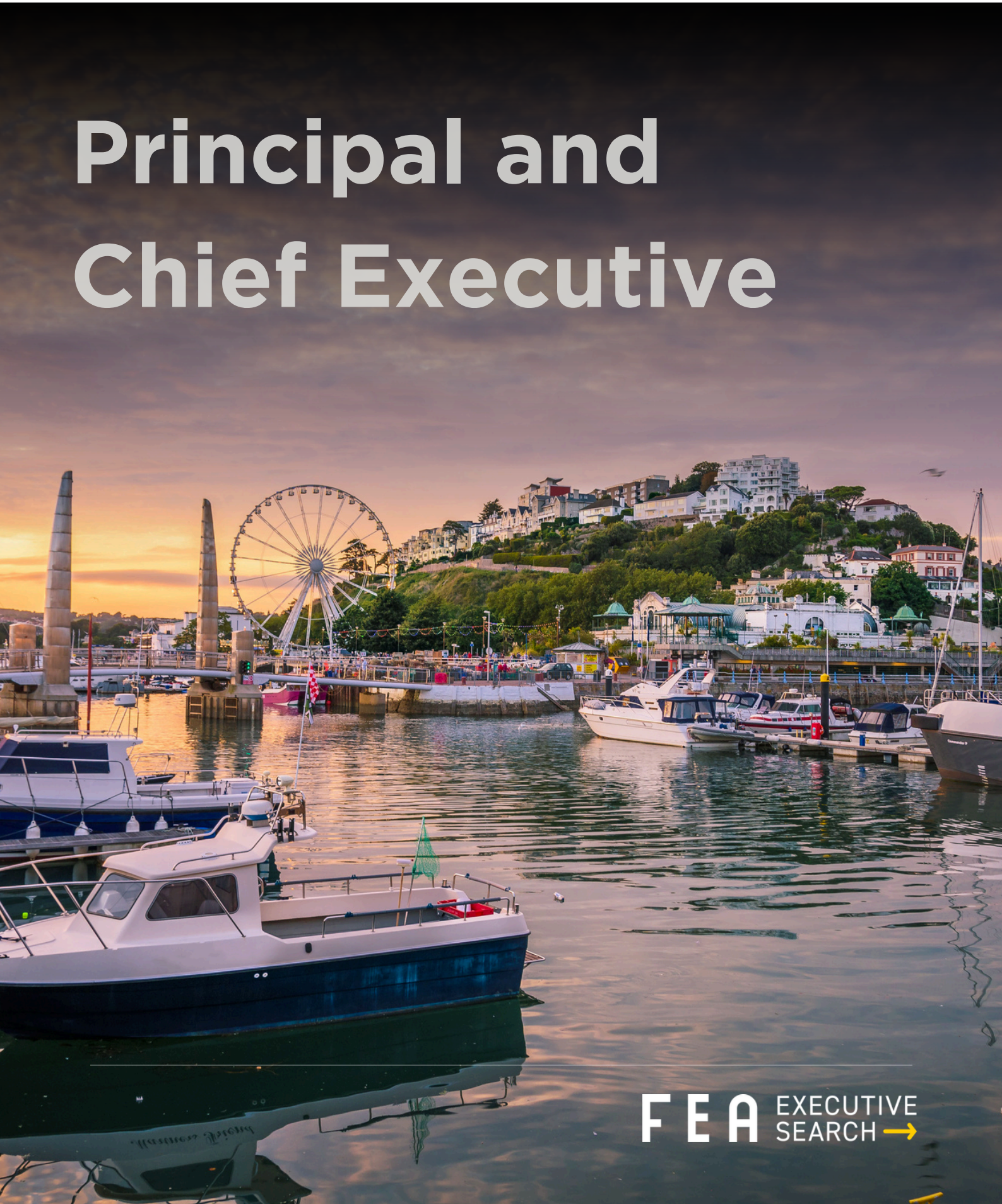
South Devon College

CANDIDATE BRIEF
November 2026

Principal and Chief Executive



FEA EXECUTIVE SEARCH



01 WELCOME

A message from our Chair

Thank you for your interest in the position of Principal & CEO at South Devon College. The whole College community is excited about the prospect of welcoming a new Principal & CEO to the College to build on the significant contribution made by our outgoing leader Lawrence Frewin for which we are all very grateful. This information pack has been compiled to give you an insight into our College and the significant role you are considering.

> **"Our ambition, values and commitment to a culture of improvement and excellence place students at the heart of everything we do."**

Based at our Vantage Point campus in Paignton, South Devon College is a further and higher education college serving Torbay, South Devon and beyond. We provide a wide range of study programmes, apprenticeships, adult learning and university-level courses, the latter through University Centre South Devon, which was re-accredited with a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Gold rating in 2023. Our specialist provision includes the Hi Tech and Digital Skills Centre, the South West Energy Centre and South Devon Marine Academy, and South Devon High School is based on our Paignton campus. We serve an average of 8,500 students every academic year. We work closely with employers and stakeholders across the region to meet local skills needs and support economic growth.

You will find a College with strong foundations and a reputation for excellence. In our most recent Ofsted inspection (April 2024), we were judged 'Good' overall and 'Outstanding' in four areas: behaviour and attitudes, personal development, provision for learners with high needs and education programmes for young people.

Awards from across the country have recognised the work we do for our students and our community. In 2026, University Centre South Devon won Nursing Associate Provider of the Year at the Student Nursing Times Awards for its “Train and Retain” model, ahead of some of the country’s most established nursing education providers.

We also received the Greener Futures Award at the Torbay Business Awards, which recognises our ESG principles in practice. In 2024 we were named Sustainability Institution of the Year at the Green Gown Awards and in 2025 we were a finalist in the international category, competing alongside universities from around the world. We also won the Planet Saver award at the 2025 Devon Business Awards.

Earlier accolades include Beacon Awards for Support for Students and for Education for Sustainable Development and national recognition for our apprenticeship work from City & Guilds and the AAC. We have achieved all eight Gatsby benchmarks for careers guidance.

Like many further education colleges, we have worked hard to deliver high-quality education and training in an incredibly tight fiscal environment and as reported in 2025, the college approached the DFE for short-term working capital support and this ultimately led to the college being placed into intervention. Through the Single Improvement Plan that was agreed with the DFE and the FE Commissioner’s team, we are working through a clear action plan and are making good progress in having our Financial Notice to Improve in the timescales agreed with the Department. We will obviously be able to discuss in detail how we are progressing through this journey with firm candidates through the recruitment and selection process.

Our ambition, values and commitment to a culture of improvement and excellence place students at the heart of everything we do. You will find a dedicated staff team focused on helping every learner to achieve their potential, supported by a College that invests in the wellbeing and development of its people.

Within this context, we are looking for a leader who can:

- Provide highly effective strategic leadership, ensuring the College’s strategy is ambitious, inclusive and deliverable;
- Quickly gain the trust of internal and external stakeholders, partners and regulators;
- Ensure the College, achieves the objectives of our DFE approved Single Improvement Plan, and works with governors and senior leaders to strengthen the longer term financial outlook for the college;

- Sustain and further raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, as well as student outcomes and progression;
- Continue to develop our higher education and apprenticeship provision, building on our TEF Gold rating and national recognition;
- Act as an exceptional ambassador for the College, strengthening partnerships with employers and stakeholders locally, regionally and nationally;
- Champion an inclusive, ambitious culture and continue our sector-leading commitment to sustainability.

As a candidate, you will find that the Governing Body at South Devon College is passionate, skilled and fully committed to the success of our College. We are dedicated to working collaboratively with our Principal & CEO and to supporting their professional development and wellbeing.

We invite you to explore our College further and encourage you to visit us to experience our vibrant community first-hand. Your leadership will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of South Devon College and we look forward to receiving your application.

We have engaged FE Associates to support us with this crucial appointment. Please do get in touch with Jo.Johnston@fea.co.uk to find out more about this opportunity.

Thank you once again for considering South Devon College as the next step in your career. We look forward to the positive impact you could bring to our College and the communities we serve.

Best regards,
Martin Foulger FCMA, CGMA, FRIN
Chair of Governors



Job description

Job Title:	**Principal and Chief Executive Officer (Principal & CEO)**
Reports to:	**The Governing Body (the Corporation), through the Chair**
Direct reports:	**Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality and Deputy CEO** **Vice Principal People and Resources** **Finance Director** **Executive Assistants to the Principal and CEO**

Main Purpose of the Role

The Principal & CEO leads South Devon College and is accountable to the Governing Body for its educational, financial, operational and reputational performance.

As Accounting Officer, the postholder is personally responsible to Parliament and the Department for Education (DfE) for the College's use of public funds.

Working with the Governing Body, they will set and deliver a strategy to 2035 that grows the College and secures its long-term financial health.

They will build a culture of ambition, accountability and care in which every learner is developed as a whole person. They will also build strong relationships with a wide range of stakeholders and partners including the DfE, the Further Education Commissioner, employers, regional partners and emerging stakeholders such as mayoral authorities.



Key Accountabilities

Lead strategy and performance

- Lead the development of a College strategy to 2035 with the Governing Body and stakeholders during the first year in post. Make sure it reflects the College's mission and values, is deliverable and supports growth.
- Set College-wide KPIs and financial targets aligned to the strategy and make sure they are met.
- Design and lead the operating model needed to deliver the strategy.
- Lead the College in a devolved landscape. This includes the move to a mayoral authority, the skills remit of the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority, and the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).
- Anticipate changes in national policy, funding and regulation, and act early on the opportunities they bring.
- Build a culture of evidence-based decision making, honest scrutiny of performance and clear accountability.
- Monitor all aspects of College performance and lead improvement where it is needed.
- Keep strategic options, including partnerships, under review in a competitive market and advise the Governing Body on them.

Lead curriculum, quality and learner outcomes

Quality and outcomes

- Deliver excellent teaching, learning and assessment across all provision: 14–16 direct entry, 16–18, adult learning, apprenticeships and higher education.
- Keep learner outcomes improving, at or above national averages.
- Keep the College ready for Ofsted inspection at all times, across all provision.
- Make sure quality assurance and self-assessment drive continuous improvement in all programmes and services.

Curriculum strategy and reform

- Lead the College through national qualification reform, including V Levels, T Levels and level 2 pathways.
- Keep the curriculum financially sustainable, current and responsive to learner and employer demand.
- Review the curriculum regularly and innovate in its design and delivery.

Employer, apprenticeship and higher education development

- Co-design curriculum with industry, including short, modular and tailored courses.
- Develop the College's apprenticeship strategy and delivery.
- Grow higher education provision in line with Office for Students (OfS) requirements, including the partnership with the University of Plymouth.

Learner support and progression

- Provide strong pastoral, personal and careers support at every stage.
- Make sure learners progress well into further study and employment.

Build partnerships, influence and reputation

Influence and policy engagement

- Build strong working relationships with the DfE, the FE Commissioner, local and regional political structures and stakeholders, the emerging mayoral authorities, local authorities, schools and universities.
- Take on targeted roles on external boards, such as the combined authority's skills board, where they benefit the College and the region.
- Represent the College regionally and nationally, and share good practice.

Growth and market position

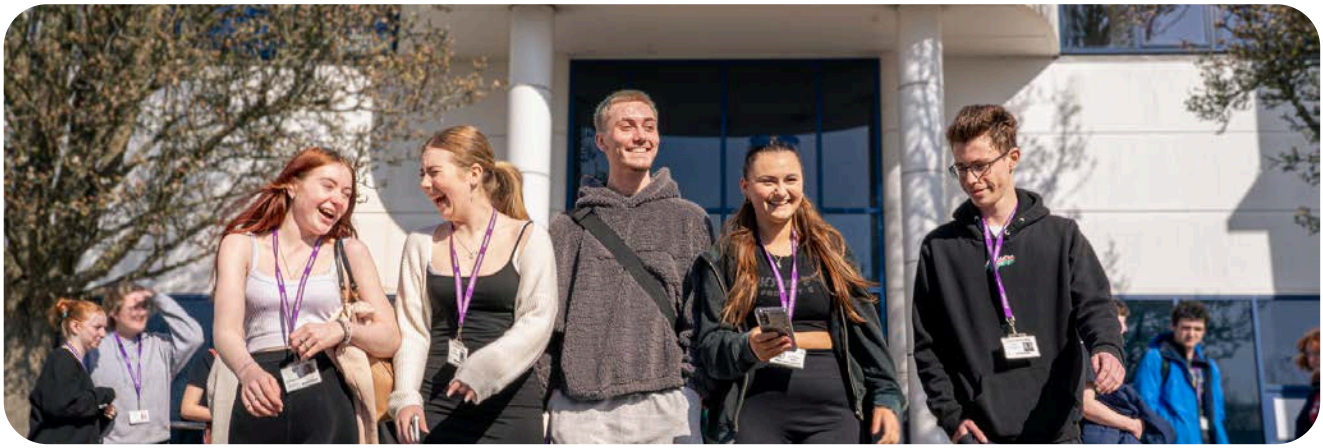
- Grow the College's reach beyond Torbay, including in Teignbridge and the South Hams.
- Compete effectively for learners, apprentices, employers and partners.
- Make sure the College's provision meets the needs of its communities and the regional economy.

Communications and public profile

- Protect and build the College's reputation as an influential, respected partner.
- Oversee marketing and communications across all channels.

Lead people, culture and resources

- Lead a senior leadership team with the capability, stability and succession planning to deliver the strategy.
- Lead change in a way that keeps staff on board and sustains morale, recognising staff's work during the intervention period.
- Create an inclusive, ambitious culture and promote staff wellbeing. Use staff survey results and retention data to measure progress and act on them.
- Inspire staff to set high aspirations for all learners and to pursue excellence in teaching and learning.
- Lead a strong safeguarding culture, with a safe and healthy environment for students, staff and visitors.
- Champion equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the College.
- Make sure estates, learning resources and equipment are fit for purpose and used efficiently. Lead on environmental sustainability and secure capital funding for growth.



Manage finance and risk

- As Accounting Officer, be personally accountable for the regularity and propriety of the College's expenditure, value for money, compliance with funding requirements and the effective stewardship of public funds, including raising any material concerns formally with the Governing Body.
- Secure the College's financial sustainability through effective planning, resource allocation, risk management and value for money.
- Ensure robust frameworks for internal control, assurance, procurement, delegation and business continuity.
- Make evidence-based decisions across college resources and services, balancing ambition with prudent stewardship.
- Embed social and environmental responsibility in strategic and operational decision-making.
- Make sure every member of staff understands their part in meeting the College's KPIs and financial targets, alongside quality and curriculum targets.
- Meet the key financial targets set by the Governing Body, i.e. EBITDA, cash days, gearing and financial health.
- Ensure all statutory, regulatory and funding requirements are met on time.
- Review the strategic risk register regularly and manage risk proactively.
- Ensure strategies are in place to grow and diversify income through commercial, enterprise and employer-funded activity.

Support effective governance

- Serve as a member of the Governing Body and of all its committees except the Audit Committee.
- Keep the Governing Body fully and openly informed about performance, risks and major developments, including the matters required by the Instrument and Articles of Government.
- Work with the Chair and the Head of Governance, forming an effective triumvirate so that governance is well planned, responsive and impactful.
- Make sure the College's management and organisation meet the standards set by the Governing Body, regulators and the law.
- Support governor development and succession planning.



Accounting Officer responsibilities

The Accounting Officer is personally responsible for the proper stewardship of the public funds the College receives. The postholder will:

- **Personal accountability:** hold personal responsibility for the College's financial management and governance compliance. This sits alongside the collective legal responsibility of the Governing Body.
- **Managing Public Money:** manage all public resources in line with HM Treasury's four standards:
  - **Regularity:** spending only within the College's legal powers and authority.
  - **Propriety:** meeting high standards of public conduct and integrity.
  - **Value for money:** using revenue and capital economically, efficiently and effectively.
  - **Feasibility:** making sure plans and major projects can be delivered.
- **Annual statement:** sign the statement of regularity, propriety and compliance each year and submit it with the annual financial statements.
- **College oversight:** ensure effective arrangements are in place for financial administration and internal control across the organisation.
- **Compliance:** meet the requirements of the College Financial Handbook, the College Accounts Direction and the College's funding agreements.
- **Parliamentary scrutiny:** be ready to appear before the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee to account for the College's use of public money.

This job description is not a complete definition of the post. The postholder is expected to take on any work within the remit of the post's main objectives. The job description will be kept under review and may be changed, subject to consultation with the postholder.

The postholder will lead in accordance with the College's policies, procedures, statutory duties and regulatory obligations, and will champion best practice in safeguarding, equality, diversity, inclusion and equity. They will promote a safe, inclusive and values-led culture across the College, ensuring that policy, decision making and day-to-day practice reflect high professional standards and support excellent outcomes for learners, staff and the communities the College serves.



Person specification

Qualifications & Training Undertaken

Essential

- Degree or equivalent professional qualification, or a sustained record of relevant, accredited CPD.

Desirable

- Postgraduate qualification.
- Leadership or management qualification.
- Teaching qualification.

Knowledge & Experience

Essential

- Proven record of meeting KPIs, achieving financial and performance targets, and delivering growth in a complex organisation.
- Significant senior strategic leadership experience in further education or a closely related education setting.
- Experience of working with the DfE and/or the FE Commissioner, or other education regulators and funders.
- Strong understanding of financial management and accountability in a publicly funded college, sufficient to act as Accounting Officer.
- Strong experience of curriculum development, quality assurance and improving standards.
- Experience of growing curriculum and learner numbers.
- Understanding of current curriculum and qualification reform (V Levels, T Levels, level 2 pathways) and its impact on a college.
- Track record of leading change in a complex environment while keeping staff engaged and achieving planned outcomes.
- Track record of building partnerships with employers and multiple significant stakeholders.
- Track record of successful innovation and income generation.
- Commitment to inclusion and belief in the transforming power of further and higher education.
- Experience across a broad mix of provision: 14–16, 16–18, adult, apprenticeships and higher education.

Desirable

- Experience of Ofsted inspection at a senior level.
- Experience of working with combined or mayoral authorities, LSIPs, or in a devolved skills system.
- Experience of serving on external boards.

Skills, Attributes & Qualities

Esssential

- A strategic thinker able to set out a credible vision for the College to 2035 and beyond, and develop it with the board.
- Commitment to high quality teaching and learning and to learners' wider development and wellbeing.
- Ability to set clear targets, use data and evidence to make decisions and hold others to account.
- Ability to read and act on the education, funding and devolution landscape, recognising and seizing opportunities.
- Commercial awareness and ability to compete for learners, apprentices and partners in a competitive market.
- Excellent interpersonal skills, with the presence and credibility to lead as an ambassador locally, regionally and nationally.
- Ability to enthuse, inspire and motivate staff and students.
- Ability to take decisions in a consultative way and deliver outcomes.
- Commitment to the College's mission and values and to the students, sectors and communities it serves.

Desirable

- Knowledge of socio-economic factors, including deprivation, and how they affect education.

Essential Personal qualities

- An inspirational, people-focused leader with a strong connection to community.
- Drive, resilience and tenacity; calm and reassuring under pressure.
- Excellent judgement and the ability to balance risk and opportunity, with realism rather than optimism bias.
- Strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Personal integrity, honesty and openness with the board.
- Emotional intelligence.



How to Apply

We have retained FE Associates to support us in finding an outstanding individual to inspire excellent practice across our organisation. The application process is outlined below.

1

Initial Discussion
Prior to submitting an application, interested parties should arrange an initial conversation with our FE Associates lead consultant, by emailing **Jo.Johnston@fea.co.uk**, to discuss the role before the closing date.

2

Recorded First-Stage Teams Interview
Once it is agreed for you to proceed with an application, the lead consultant will schedule a first-stage interview via Teams with you which will take place before the closing date and will be recorded. Once this interview has been scheduled, you should submit your application.

3

Apply Online
Please visit **www.fea.co.uk/job/sdc-pceo** and complete the registration form to access the online application form and the equality and diversity form. At Step 2: Submitting your application, click Apply now.

4

Shortlisting and Invitation to Interview
After the closing time/date, our lead consultant will send all applications and recorded first-stage discussions to the College for shortlisting. Once the shortlist has been agreed, candidates will be notified by the lead consultant and shortlisted candidates will be invited to a formal interview/selection process with the College.

5

Safer Recruitment and Due Diligence Checks
Applicants are advised that, as part of the statutory guidance on Keeping Children Safe in Education, colleges/training providers are advised to make arrangements for an online search as part of due diligence on shortlisted candidates. The searches are aimed to assist in identifying things said or done that may harm the organisation's reputation or make the candidate unsuitable to work with children, young people and vulnerable adults. Where a cause of concern arises from the online search, a risk assessment will determine whether the concern is of such a nature that it is appropriate to exclude a candidate from the process or whether a clarification discussion, before or during an interview, is needed.

Key Dates

Closing date for applications: 9am on Wednesday 27 January 2027.

Interviews to take place on Tuesday 9 and Wednesday 10 February 2027.

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South Devon College



Thank you for your interest

in joining South Devon College and considering us as the next step and destination in your career.

To discuss the role, contact FEA's lead consultant **Jo.Johnston@fea.co.uk**

www.southdevon.ac.uk

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