



Connecting



**CST Annual
Conference 26**

15 & 16 October, ICC, Birmingham

#CSTConf26

Why They Join, and Why They Stay: Connecting People to Trust Mission



Mandy Coalter
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TALENT
ARCHITECTS



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Connecting People to Trust

Mission

John Tarbox

CEO, Apex
Collaborative Trust

Katie Atherton

Director of
Professional
Development, Apex

Rebecca Ah-chin-kow

Director of People, Apex

Caroline Pusey

COO, River Learning Trust



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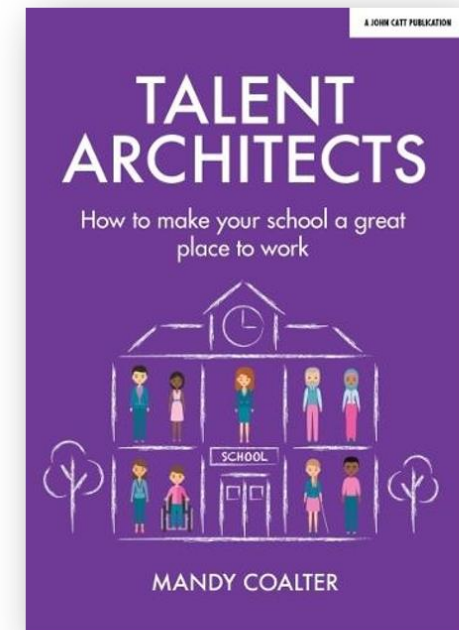


About Talent Architects

- Simple mission - *to help schools become great places to work*
- **Platinum Partner with CST**
- Worked with over 100 Multi Academy Trusts
- Core activities include:
 - Developing and communicating Trust People strategy
 - Developing capacity and skills of HR
 - Working with Trusts and other partners on strategic People projects
 - Keynotes and training for MAT and school leaders
 - Executive coaching, mentoring and 360
 - Development programmes and mentoring

Look out for the new book next year!

TALENT ARCHITECTS



Why People Matter

Colleagues **join** a local school for its **mission**.

They **stay** when the Trust protects **their reality**.

Pupils cannot thrive on a revolving door.



Why do people stay or leave?

Why people consider resigning

- Feel undervalued
- Workload
- Low morale

Why people choose to stay

- Supportive colleagues
- Passion for the profession
- Feel valued
- Supportive line manager
- Leadership

edurio

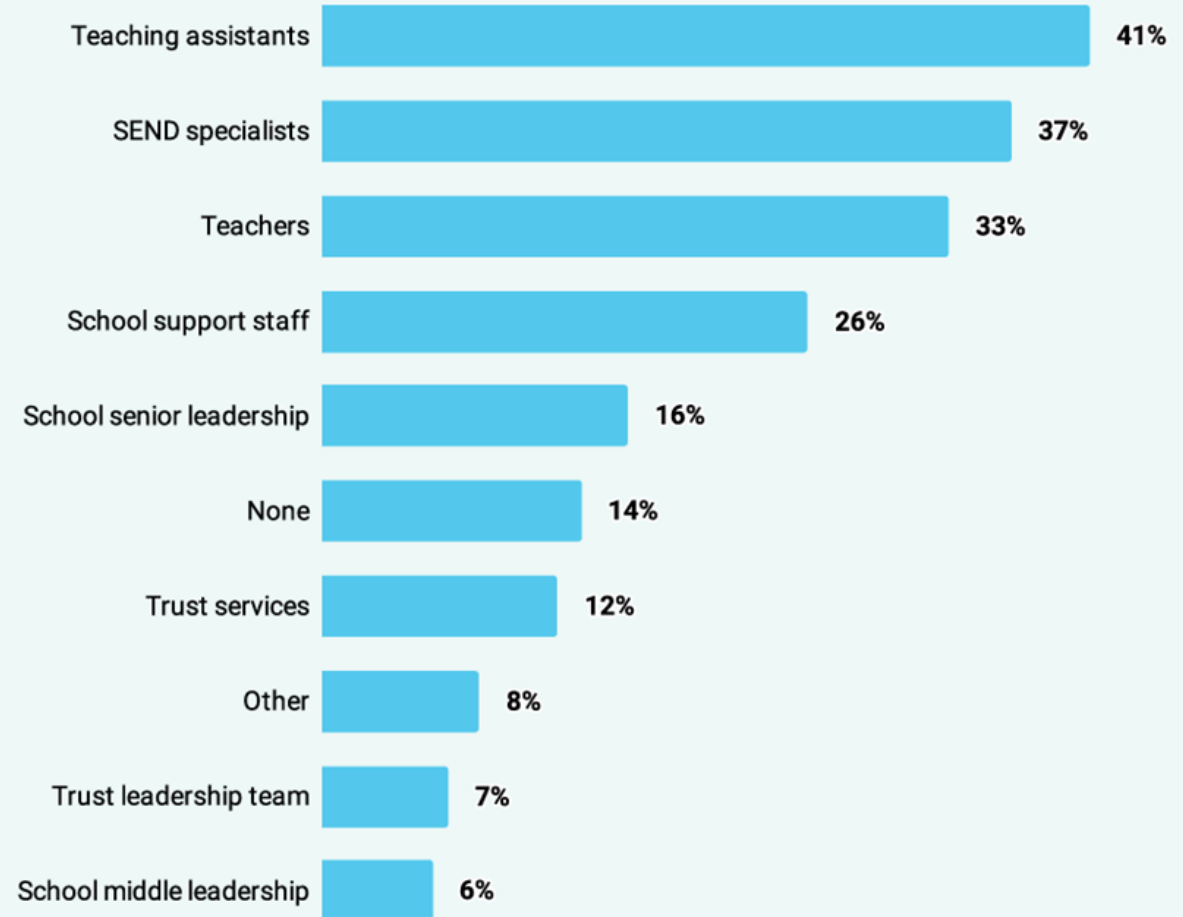
It is all about the **culture** of the workplace for **all** our employees



Attracting recruits

- It is still tough to recruit great people to many roles
- Your reputation as an employer matters as much as your reputation as an educator – your **‘employer brand’**
- Potential recruits very local to your schools; teachers circa 7 miles, support staff 2 miles

Which roles, if any, has your trust struggled to fill vacancies in this year?



Connection could be better

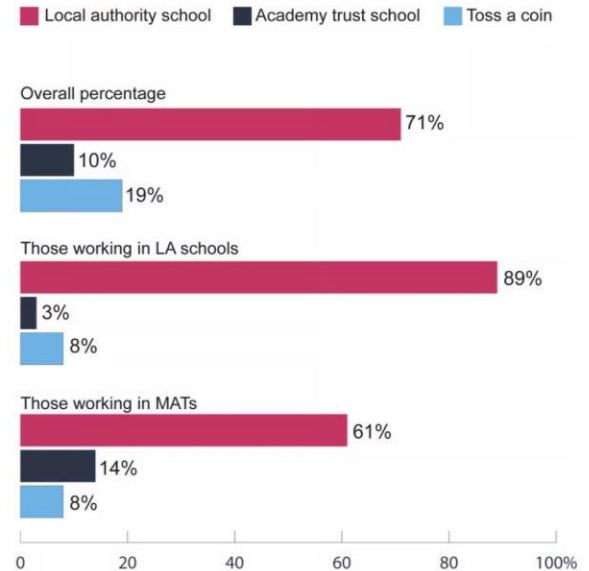
Only **31%** of school staff feel strongly connected to their trust community:

- Teachers (**28%**) & TAs (**32%**) least connected, compared with leadership (**62%**).

edurio

Where people say they feel part of a trust community, they are much more likely to recommend their workplace.

Would teachers rather work in a trust or LA school?

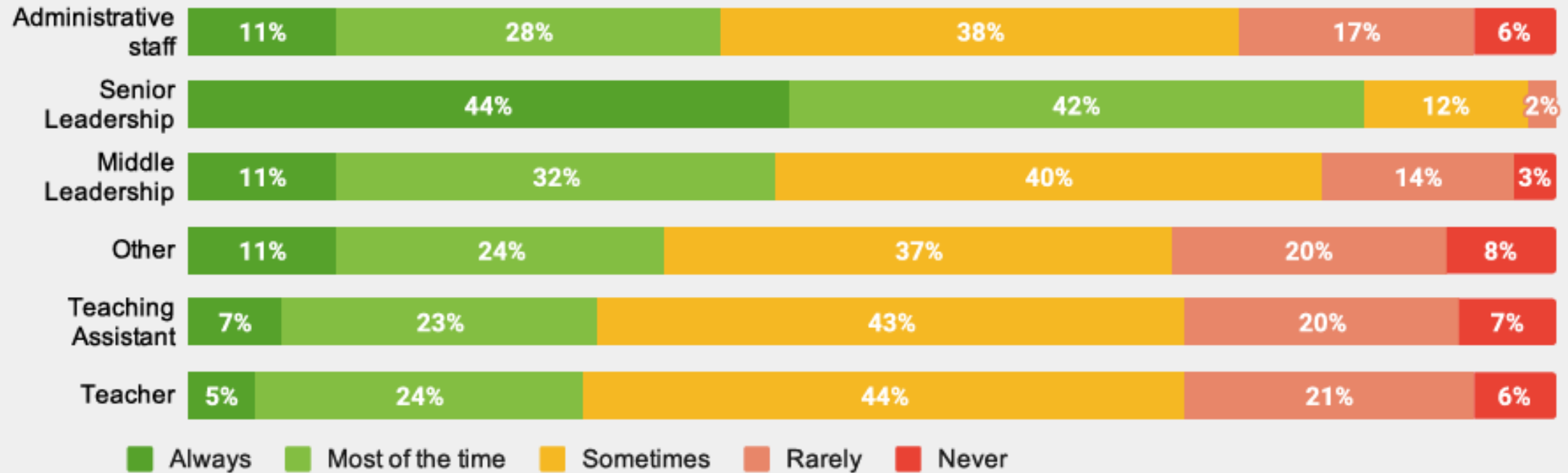


Source: Teacher Tapp

Connection could be better

How often do you see that your feedback to the leadership has impact?

By Role (2025/2026)



At a time when...

- Pace of change is great
- Capacity is stretched
- Finances are tight
- Recruitment & retention remains a challenge for many schools
- Yet pupil demographics are also impacting staffing levels

The connection risk has become greater



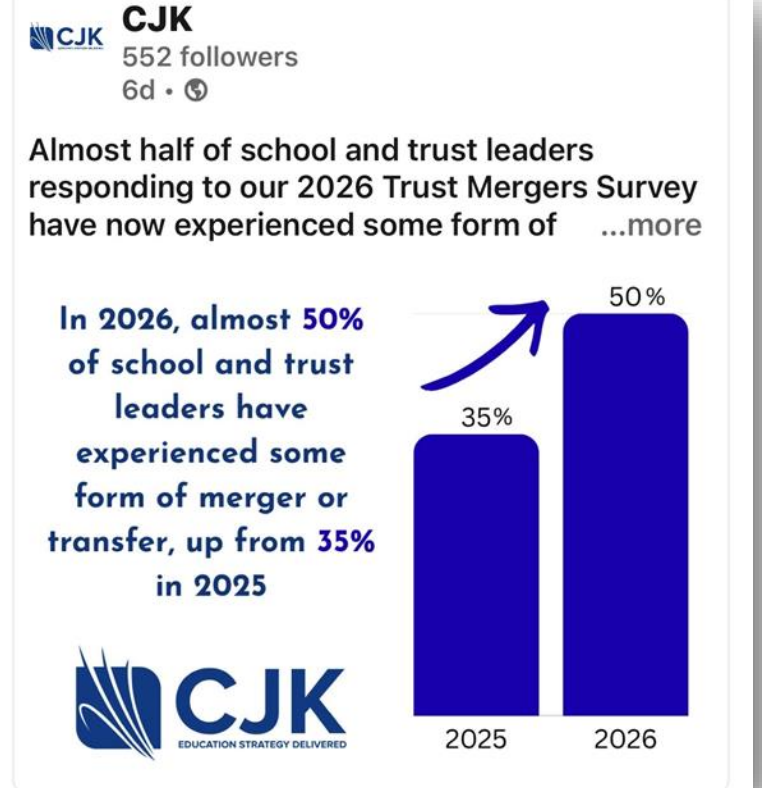
At a time when....

Mergers and growth are on the up

What are the top five strategic priorities for your trust in the next academic year?



The connection risk has become greater



People and culture vital to success

- **Harvard Business Review:** 70-90% mergers fail to meet objectives due to culture mismatch
- **McKinsey & Company:** managing culture effectively during integration planning = 50% more likely to meet or achieve synergy targets
- **KPMG:** 26% more likely to succeed and neglecting culture until after the merger date drastically diminishes success rates



The Balance Sheet of Connection

THE DISCONNECTED TRUST

- × **£££+ Wasted** ad spend & agency supply
- × **1 in 5 support staff** (50% of workforce) leaving the sector
- × **Headteacher drain:** Heads and leaders trapped in repeat hiring loops
- × **Impact on pupils:** churn impacts learning and outcomes

THE CONNECTED TRUST

- ✓ **Organic Pipeline:** High candidate conversion & retention
- ✓ **Internal Mobility:** Talent retained across Trust schools
- ✓ **Operational Stability:** Preserved capacity & school focus
- ✓ **Pupil outcomes:** Consistent high quality teaching

Closing the Gap

“Next to doing the right thing, the most important thing is to let people know you are doing the right thing.”

SAY

What you promise
candidates & employees

DO

What your people
experience in post

SHOW

Surface peer proof - let
your people tell their story

Community-building & communication

**Connecting employees and
creating 'Our Trust' following a
merger**



**Connecting potential recruits and
bringing the Trust 'offer' to life**

Apex Collaborative Trust

5 schools & 1 associate school: Newly merged April 2025 –merger of a Single Academy Trust with a small Trust (4 schools)

454 staff, 3,794 students: Geographically located in close proximity across Yorkshire Lancashire border

Cross phase: EYFS – KS5:

3 primary, 2 secondary, 1 associate secondary incorporating 2 nurseries, and 1 sixth form provision)

Diverse Catchment:

Students drawn from communities with varied urban, rural and town characteristics – diverse student population and need.

Challenge: Mergers bring about legacy assumptions, politics, and the fear of the unknown – our people needed reassurance, clarity, and a sense of involvement in the direction of the new organisation.

Priority: Define identity, culture and workforce priorities, whilst recognising fear of the unknown, uncertainty and hesitancy around change.

Apex Collaborative Trust

John Tarbox, CEO



Why the trust decided to merge, the benefits of this and how you went about engaging all staff before it happened



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Apex Collaborative Trust



Katie Atherton, Director of Professional Development

Shortly after the merger you decided to work on a training day and people strategy – why was this important, how did you go about it and what impact have you seen so far



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Apex Collaborative Trust



Rebecca Ah-chin-kow, Director of People

As someone who has joined the trust post-merger, what are the ongoing challenges and opportunities for connecting staff and what's next



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River Learning Trust

A diverse range of schools and settings

- 13/31 Sponsored
- 2000+ to 50 pupils
- Rural and urban
- <10% to >70% Pupil Premium
- <1% to > 5% EHCP
- 31 to be 32 schools and settings
 - 20 (+1) Pri, 10 Sec, 1 AP
- SCITT (200+ trainees, 3 counties)
- Teaching School Hub (Oxfordshire)



Challenge: Improving quality of recruits within context of aligned autonomy



River Learning Trust



Caroline Pusey Chief Operating Officer

Can you tell us about the work you had already done on your people strategy and recruitment processes and why you wanted to take this a step further?



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River Learning Trust



What insights did you learn from the employer brand audit and what changes are you making as a result?



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Why They Join, Why They Stay

Connection is the foundation of trust culture and retention

BUILD

Culture from Within

Listen actively and close the loop so staff see feedback driving change

PROTECT

Through Change

Bring people along through change; culture can't wait or be left to chance

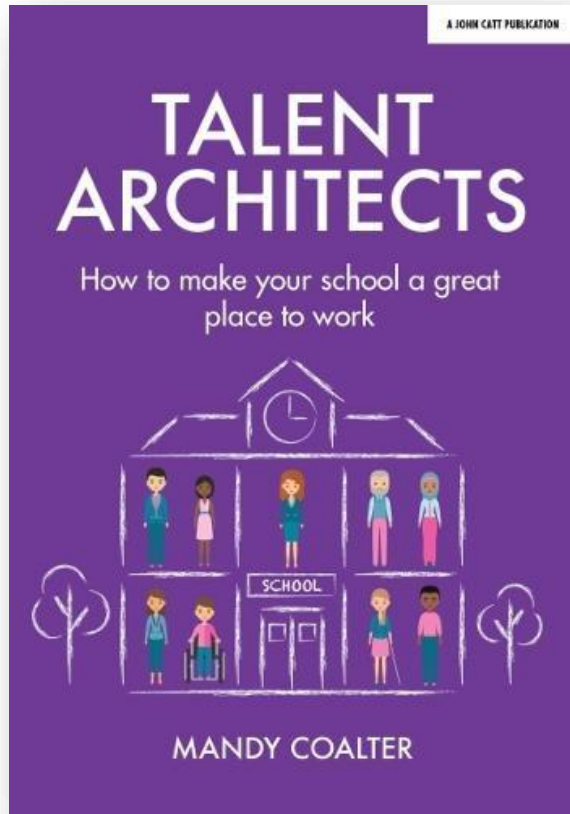
PROMOTE

Through Stories

Let real staff tell the school story; ditch transactional job adverts

The common thread: Support school leaders with practical toolkits & tools so **great communication is the easiest option.**

Thank you for your time!



Mandy Coalter
Founder of Talent Architects
Co-Founder Trust Inclusion

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Connect with us!



Mandy Coalter
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Thank you



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