

60 seconds with... Emma Hughes

With 19 HR experts now supporting over 500 schools and trusts across the country, in this edition of 60 seconds we sit down with Emma Hughes, who leads the team, to discuss what this significant milestone means to her.

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2022 marks the 10th anniversary of our HR consultancy service for schools. With 19 HR experts now supporting over 500 schools and trusts across the country, in this edition of 60 seconds we sit down with Emma Hughes, who leads the team, to discuss what this significant milestone means to her.

Congratulations, Emma, 10 years is an awesome achievement. How do you and the team plan to celebrate?

We all got together in December for the first time in two years. It was at this event that we realised it was our 10-year anniversary in 2022! Since then we have been dreaming up lots of ideas to celebrate, and now we have a very thorough plan. The plan entails both internal and external celebrations and the involvement of clients to collect feedback - especially from longstanding clients who have been with us from the beginning.

Before joining Browne Jacobson, you were an in-house HR Director. How has this experience enabled you to develop services that complement internal teams?

I draw on my in-house experience all the time when speaking with clients and a lot of the issues that I faced as an in-house HR Director (nearly five years ago) are still relevant to clients today. I also thoroughly enjoy being a trustee in a multi-academy trust and this experience further enables me to keep my finger on the pulse and ensure that we are delivering services that really hit the mark for clients.

How has the role of HR developed over the last decade?

HR has gone through a lot of change across all sectors in the last 10 years. In the last two years specifically, HR has never been needed as much. Organisations that have not fully embraced the value that HR can add to achieving their business goals have struggled to get to grips with the people challenges brought by the pandemic.

Gone are the days of the old-fashioned 'personnel department' and HR is no longer in the business of just being great administrators. Over the last 10 years HR has demonstrated time and time again that it has a fundamentally important role in business success. Many changes have occurred in the profession, but I would say the largest shift has been HR having more of a business focus, enabling leaders to deliver on business priorities. Also, HR has been through a bit of a re-brand! More and more HR teams are known as 'the People team'. This change is happening because, fundamentally, people who make up an organisation are so much more than just a resource. People are the organisation's ideas, its creativity, its ambition, its potential, and its values and culture. Responsibility for human resource shouldn't sit with one team: all leaders and line managers are responsible, while at the same time receiving expert advice and support from professionals who can help with compliance matters through to communications and employee experiences.

What do you think are the main challenges faced by HR professionals in the education sector going forward?

The challenges that we now face, coming out of the pandemic, are very much based on people. To name but a few:

These are key challenges for schools and academies, with the added challenge of a lack of leadership talent in the sector (plus a higher percentage of leaders choosing to retire earlier than planned due to the pandemic) and fewer graduates joining the teacher profession - and when they do join it, statistics show that one in six leave after their first year in post. So there is a lot to do! Alongside those big

overarching sector challenges, there is a lot of work to do in supporting academy trust mergers and takeovers, their growth in general and, from an operational perspective, helping them deliver great operational excellence and compliance.

We work with both large and small organisations in the sector, handling everything from a low-level transactional query right through to developing people strategies with CEOs and boards. Given the scale of the task, the work is incredibly rewarding and I am delighted to lead a team who are not only passionate about delivering a great service to our clients but who also want to make a real difference to enabling the achievement of great pupil outcomes.

- How to attract the best talent
- How to retain talent
- How to develop the talent we have
- How to really harness the advantages of DE&I
- How to create great places to work, where our talent can be successful and thrive

Do you have a message for the team?

- Have we helped you develop your confidence or learn a new skill?
- Was there a particular situation that you appreciated our help with?
- Do you have ambitions for the future that you'd like to share with us?
- Is there an individual that you would like to recognise for their outstanding contribution?

To mark the 10th anniversary of our HR education service we're inviting clients new and old to share their experiences and best wishes. Simply email 10yearsHR@brownejacobson.com and we'll pass your message on to the team, who we know would appreciate it.

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