


Series 4 – 2024-25

## #EdInfluence podcast (series 4): In conversation with inspiring leaders

 14 July 2025

Our #EdInfluence podcast has gone from strength to strength over its three series so far, attracting a diverse range of influential leaders sharing their inspirational stories and insight.

Hosted by our Head of Education and accredited executive coach Nick MacKenzie, #EdInfluence features down-to-earth conversations with leaders from the education sector and beyond, exploring the human side of leadership.

A full episode guide and more information on our guests are available below. You can listen to the podcast here or on [your preferred podcast channel](#), including: [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), [YouTube](#) and [Amazon Music](#).

[Catch-up on series 3](#) →

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## Episode 8: with Jonny Searle MBE, OLY

Olympic and world champion rower Jonny Searle opens our conversation with a powerful story from his coaching experience that fundamentally shifted his understanding of leadership responsibility.

Throughout the discussion, Jonny shares a philosophy centred around seeing people as genuinely unique rather than variations of ourselves. "*We see the world not as it is, but as we are,*" he explains, highlighting how this perspective has transformed his leadership

effectiveness.

Drawing from his experience as a COO in a scale-up tech business and over 13 years as general counsel and company secretary for an international business, Jonny shares some deceptively simple advice for learning leaders: understand your people and help them do what they enjoy and excel at.

Whether you're leading a sports team, business unit, or classroom, Jonny's insights remind us that effective leadership begins with seeing people as they truly are.

## Episode 7: with David Beaty

David Beaty never planned on becoming a banker. What began as "practice" for a job interview - while still planning to attend university and become an accountant - transformed into a remarkable 39-year career at Midland Bank and HSBC.

David has since established Bali Consulting, using his experience to provide leadership coaching and consultancy. He was a school governor and trustee of a fast-growing Staffordshire multi-academy trust for over ten years.

What makes a leader effective over four decades spanning economic cycles, technological revolutions, and unprecedented challenges like the COVID pandemic?

In conversation with Nick MacKenzie, David distils leadership success into just seven words, a deceptively simple framework which guided him to overseeing nearly 900 staff as head of HSBC UK Business Banking.

## Episode 6: with Sara Burks

Hear from Sara Burks, the Founder and Managing Director of Adaptis Limited. Sara excels in getting the best from people during transformational change through great leadership.

Leadership often begins long before we have any formal understanding of what it means. Sara discovered this when her school report stated: *"Sara is a born leader. The problem is she leads people in the wrong direction."* This early assessment followed her organising a sit-down strike during a netball tournament – a moment that sparked her lifelong exploration of leadership principles.

Through her conversation with Nick MacKenzie, Sara reveals how these formative experiences shaped her journey from rebellious student to corporate board member at just 29, and over two decades, supporting leaders through Adaptis to handle transformative organisational change.

## Episode 5: Leadership Conversations with Caroline Whalley and Hugh Greenway

In this episode, Dr. Caroline Whalley and Hugh Greenway, founder and CEO of the Elliot Foundation Academy Trust respectively, share their most transformative experiences and leadership insights.

They share some of their most impactful personal stories, discuss the dynamics of their partnership, and emphasise the importance of communication and adaptation in educational leadership. Their stories set the stage for a fascinating exploration of how such personal encounters have shaped their approaches to leadership and their collaboration at the Elliott Foundation.

From the moment they first met, a foundation of trust was established, paving the way for an inclusive and financially viable institution dedicated to enhancing education for disadvantaged children.

## Episode 4: Leora Cruddas CBE and CST Conference Special

This episode is comprised of two parts. In the first, we hear from Leora Cruddas CBE, CEO of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST), who shares her eye-opening journey from South Africa to the UK, highlighting disparities in educational access and offering a fresh perspective on schooling and the importance of community-rooted educational systems.

Leora advocates for the subtle power of 'quiet diplomacy' in tackling the formidable challenges confronting educational trusts, from child poverty to strategic management in hybrid learning environments.

The second part of this episode was recorded from the floor of the Annual CST Conference, where we gathered views on a range of topics from a diverse selection of leaders from across the sector, including:

- Ollie Lane - Managing Director at communications agency PLMR.
- Stephen Morales - Chief Executive at the Institute of School Business Management (ISBL).
- Gail Brown - Chief Executive at Ebor Academy Trust.
- Steve Howell - Commercial Director at Red Kite Learning Trust.
- Ernest Jenavs - Founder and CEO of Edurio.

## Episode 3: Sir Chris Husbands

Uncover the fascinating intersection of leadership and storytelling as we welcome Sir Chris Husbands, an esteemed former Vice-Chancellor and now a director of Higher Futures. He was knighted for services to education in 2018.

Chris shares how his journey from a curious history teacher to a university leader was shaped by a student's question about medieval monasteries. Get ready to explore how storytelling can transform leadership, offering insights and context through narratives like those from 'The West Wing.'

Throughout, Chris draws on his wealth of experience, from chairing the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and its pivotal role in reshaping UK universities' approach to teaching quality, (much like Ofsted inspections in schools) and from leading award-winning universities.

Chris was Vice-Chancellor for Sheffield Hallam University, one of the UK's largest, most diverse universities, and before that, the Institute of Education, University of London, a world-leading specialist research intensive institution rated first in the world in three successive years.

## Episode 2: Lauren Thorpe

Ever wonder how childhood curiosity can shape a career in educational leadership? In this episode, Lauren Thorpe, the Chief Transformation Officer at United Learning, shares her unique path from tinkering with toys under the guidance of her engineer father to spearheading transformative initiatives in schools. She currently leads England's largest trust's work on digital strategy, data and insights, curriculum and assessment.

Her story is a testament to how a relentless curiosity and love for problem-solving can lead to a career focused on balancing efficiency with emotional intelligence, ultimately creating a more connected educational environment.

Lauren draws on her experience as the Director of Standards & Performance and Director of Strategy at Ark Schools as well as her time as a research director for a thinktank in Westminster. She's also shared her expertise sitting on the DfE Ed Tech Advisory Board and Workload Review Panel and is a serving Ofsted Inspector. During the academic year 2024-25, Lauren is Chair of the CST Data and Insights Professional Community.

# Episode 1: Cathie Paine

In this episode, we hear from Cathie Paine, Chief Executive Officer of REAch2 Academy Trust.

Cathie joined REAch2 in 2012 when there were just four schools in the Trust. It's now the largest primary-only Trust in the country, supporting 62 primary academies across England.

Prior to joining REAch2 at its conception in 2012, Cathie's headship career spanned 15 years across schools in a variety of challenging circumstances.

Ever since Catherine's first headship taking a socially deprived school from 'special measures' to 'Good' in just four terms, Cathie's passion is clear. She is committed to enabling children to flourish in an environment of outstanding practice.

Cathie believes that school leadership is about changing lives. Listen now to find out how and gain further insight and inspiration.

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## Related expertise