

Principal

Candidate Information



**The Royal Belfast
Academical Institution**

RS ACADEMICS

Welcome

Thank you for your interest in the important position of Principal of The Royal Belfast Academical Institution (RBAI). The post becomes available in August 2026 in succession to Janet Williamson, who is retiring after 19 years of outstanding service.

This is an exceptional opportunity to lead one of Northern Ireland's most distinguished schools at a time of opportunity, challenge and ambition. We are looking to appoint an inspiring educational leader who will uphold the proud traditions of RBAI while shaping its future for generations to come.

As Principal, you will have the privilege of guiding a dynamic school community renowned for its academic excellence, outstanding co-curricular programme and strong civic ethos. We are proud of our heritage and achievements, and we look forward to appointing a leader who will build upon these foundations with clear vision, palpable energy and unfaltering integrity.

The successful candidate will have a proven track record of successful leadership at a senior level in

education; a commitment to achieving the highest standards in academic, pastoral and co-curricular provision; an inspiring presence with the ability to motivate and engage pupils, staff, parents and stakeholders; an unwavering commitment to the values of RBAI; and a genuine passion for nurturing and developing young people.

If you are someone with determination, patience, compassion and humour and are a leader who strives for excellence, understands innovation and recognises progression, this may be the ideal role for you, and we would be delighted to hear from you.

With best wishes,



Michael Howard
Chair

An aerial photograph of a large, vibrant green sports field, likely a Gaelic football pitch, with a cityscape visible in the background. The field is surrounded by trees and some buildings. In the foreground, there are some white structures, possibly part of a school or sports facility. The city in the background is densely packed with buildings and houses.

Introduction

RBAI is a large voluntary grammar school in the centre of Belfast with an excellent reputation in the city for providing a broad education for boys of ability, irrespective of their social or religious background. RBAI's historic and landmark city-centre building is complemented by contemporary learning environments and excellent sports facilities at Osborne, Bladon and Shaw's Bridge. It is one of only two "B" schools in Northern Ireland. The consequences of this are that while RBAI receives no government funding for building, it does have a fair degree of autonomy with regard to governance.

Founded in 1810 and affectionately known as 'Inst', the School has been at the heart of education in Northern Ireland for over two centuries, consistently demonstrating a strong commitment to the best education for boys. RBAI was established with the aim of educating young men to lead lives of learning, leadership and service. Those values remain central today. Situated in its city-centre campus, the School combines history and tradition with a modern commitment to excellence.

The School comprises around 1,050 boys in the main school (including a thriving Sixth Form) and 120 in Inchmarlo Prep School. The School

has a strong academic reputation and boasts excellent outcomes at GCSE and A Level, with strong progression to leading universities in the UK, Ireland and internationally. RBAI received an excellent recent Inspection Report, which highlighted the School's strong pastoral structures and its achievements in promoting equality, diversity and inclusivity.

Co-curricular provision is a particular strength, with RBAI being renowned for rugby, cricket and hockey, music, drama, debating and a wide range of clubs and societies, ensuring that pupils' talents are nurtured both inside and outside the classroom. RBAI has strong links with local girls' schools for collaborative projects, such as in the performing arts.

The School's mission statement is to offer exceptional learning and enrichment that enables every boy to flourish academically, physically and socially and to make a positive contribution to society. RBAI's overarching goal is to achieve continuous improvement through a strategy in which all teachers share high expectations of teaching and learning. This is informed by rigorous self-evaluation, the pupil voice, and effective use of data and supported by sound governance.

Inchmarlo Prep School

Inchmarlo is the preparatory department of RBAI, a school where every boy is known, valued and encouraged to flourish in a vibrant and supportive environment. Inchmarlo is built on the values of Excellence, Respect and Participation, and these principles are woven into every aspect of school life, from the classroom to the sports field, the music room to the playground. It is a place with a strong family ethos where boys are encouraged to be themselves, to support one another, and to take pride in their achievements. The close connection with RBAI ensures a seamless transition and structured personal development for boys from Pre-Prep through to Sixth Form.



A young man in a dark school blazer and striped tie is shown in profile, looking out a window. He is holding several books against his chest. The blazer features a crest on the left breast pocket. The background is a bright, out-of-focus view of a building and trees through a window.

School History

Established as 'The Belfast Academical Institution' in 1810, the first pupils entered in 1814. Until the government-funded Queen's College, Belfast (later Queen's University), opened in 1849, RBAI had both a School Department and a Collegiate Department. Pupils matriculated from the School Department into the Collegiate Department, which included the first medical school in Ulster, training over five hundred doctors. In 1831, King William IV granted RBAI its Royal Charter.

Having been managed by a group of senior teachers (the Headmasters) who sat on the Board of Masters, Robert Dods, Headmaster of Modern Languages, was appointed RBAI's first Principal in 1898. Since then, RBAI has had eight Principals: R. M. Jones (1898–1925), G. Garrod (1925–1939), J. C. A. Brierley (1939–1940), J. H. Grummitt (1940–1959), S. V. Peskett (1959–1978), T. J. Garrett (1978–1990), and R.

M. Ridley (1990–2006). The current Principal, Ms J. A. Williamson, was appointed in January 2007 and is the first female to hold the post.

In the 1920s, under Geoffrey Garrod's principalship, the House system was founded, the school song was written, and a school uniform, including the ubiquitous yellow-and-black quartered cap, was worn for the first time. The cultural life of RBAI, in particular music and drama, improved significantly. A scout troop was founded to complement a rich array of sports.

The serious civil disorder affecting Belfast in the 1970s and 1980s was a considerable challenge to RBAI as a city-centre school. However, despite the difficulties of the situation, RBAI is proud of the fact that not one school day was lost in this period.

The Opportunity

This is a tremendous opportunity for a new Principal to shape the future of an institution with a national and international reputation. Working closely alongside a large, supportive and dedicated Board, the successful candidate will assist them in providing the vision and planning that will take the School forward, for example, continuing the excellent progress in the co-curricular programme and capitalising on the opportunities provided by the projected opening of a new South Wing, incorporating 14 new classrooms, a drama suite and dining hall, in December 2026.

The new Principal will enjoy the privilege of leading one of the most prestigious grammar schools in Northern Ireland and beyond. It is a school community with proud traditions and a progressive outlook, where pupils are enthusiastic and capable, staff are committed and talented, and active alumni networks operate across the world.

The School is financially secure with sound fiscal stewardship. A strong and empathetic relationship between the Principal and the Bursar is vital.

The key objectives for the new Principal will include:

- To support all pupils to be confident and engaged learners;
- To deliver an innovative academic programme with individual curriculum pathways;
- To provide co-curricular breadth and depth;
- To prioritise pupil and staff well-being;
- To maintain and develop effective communication;
- To encourage teaching infused with evidence-based best practice.





Admissions & Bursaries

About 150 new pupils enter RBAI every year from a wide variety of social, cultural and academic backgrounds. The School recognises that the transition from primary school to post-primary school in Year 8 is a very significant and formative stage in the social and educational development of children and therefore places great importance on managing this successfully so that each pupil can enjoy and profit from their time at RBAI. The School provides an innovative induction programme which assimilates new pupils from around 150 primary schools into Year 8 each year.

Places are offered in Year 8 based on the outcome of a boy's performance in the assessment organised and conducted by the Schools' Entrance Assessment Group (SEAG). If there are places available in Years 9, 10, or 11, the School will wish to be satisfied that applicants have the ability and aptitude to benefit from the education provided at RBAI.

Pupils wishing to enter the Sixth Form will normally require a minimum of 12 points (A* = 4 points; A = 3 points; B = 2 points; C* = 1 ½ points; C = 1 point) and undertake three AS or equivalents. Pupils are generally expected to have achieved at least a Grade B or a high Grade C* at GCSE level in the subjects they wish to study in the Sixth Form. If a subject is oversubscribed, the criteria may be enhanced.

The Governors believe that no boy should be denied an education at the School if he has, or has obtained, a place at the School because his parents or guardians cannot afford to pay the fees which the School charges. The School's Fees Bursary Scheme supports parents or guardians who find themselves in this position and is funded in part from the School's own funds but also from the generosity of old boys and other supporters of the School.

The Curriculum

RBAI is committed to maintaining the highest educational standards in a caring environment. The broad and stimulating curriculum is the means by which the School translates this vision into practice.

At KS3, the boys are encouraged to develop a wide range of thinking skills and personal capabilities in addition to acquiring subject-specific knowledge. This includes a focus on developing the essential cross-curricular skills of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT. For GCSE, all boys study English Language, English Literature and Mathematics, together with a range of other elective subjects.

The RBAI Sixth Form experience is outstanding as it promotes academic excellence and enrichment alongside a vast array of co-curricular opportunities. In addition to choosing from an extensive suite of A Levels, boys can also opt to study a range of BTEC courses, including Diplomas in Sport (Performance and Excellence), Engineering and IT.





Sport, the Performing Arts & Activities

Sport

RBAI has an enviable reputation for high achievement in competitive sport whilst also promoting the benefits of sport and exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle and something to participate in for fun. RBAI strives for success in excellence and participation and to enhance the skill levels and sense of identity in each pupil. With access to facilities at well-appointed and equipped sites, such as Osborne, Bladon and Shaw's Bridge, RBAI is known for performance in sport at an extremely high level.

The Rugby Club is proud of its inclusive approach, with close to 300 pupils representing teams each Saturday. Cricket at RBAI has a long and proud tradition of success. The opportunity to start playing Cricket at RBAI starts even before boys enter the

School, as they are invited to a pre-Year 8 Cricket summer camp. The School has ten Cricket teams, ranging from the Under 12 XI through to the 1st XI, with three Cricket pitches, located at the Osborne playing fields. In addition to these core sports, the School also offers Athletics, Golf, Hockey, Racquets Sports, Rowing, Swimming and Water Polo.

In recent years, the RBAI Football Club has also improved, reaching the quarter and semi-finals of cup competitions as well as winning the Northern Ireland Plate in 2020. The School fields an Under 16 team, a Second XI and an Under 18 1st XI who compete in the Northern Ireland Cup, the Belfast Cup and the U18 Belfast League.

Music

A huge number of boys are involved in the many voluntary musical activities at RBAI, such as Choir, Orchestra and Jazz Band. Boys have numerous opportunities to perform at the many high-quality concerts and recitals that take place throughout the year.

The Choir is open to all boys and is readily subscribed to. The repertoire is as wide-ranging as possible, from the great classics such as Haydn, Mozart and Britten to more contemporary styles like Radiohead, U2 and Queen. The standard is extremely high, and the Choir has made numerous television and radio appearances. They have also won many awards, including the UTV School Choir of the Year.

Performing Arts

The School celebrates and encourages all forms of the expressive and performing arts and is committed to providing all boys with creative opportunities to capture the imagination. In the safe environment of the Drama studio, it promotes a culture of creativity, learning and ambition through nurturing collaboration and personal growth.

Each year, Senior pupils get the opportunity to take part in a large-scale musical alongside girls from Victoria College, Belfast – always a highlight of the calendar year. The Senior Drama Society also showcase their talents in the more intimate venue of the Christchurch Library. Senior pupils interested in the technical aspects of theatre have the opportunity to work alongside the professional sound and lighting company 'Mac Sound'. Both Senior and Junior Drama pupils get the opportunity to take part in workshops at the Grand Opera House and The Lyric Theatre, and the School regularly supports pupils doing external performances, as well as welcoming theatre companies to provide internal workshops.

Combined Cadet Force

The CCF is open to boys from Year 9 upwards and aims to develop leadership, self-confidence and team-working skills within a military environment. The cadets take part in ranges, field craft and survival skills, first aid, drill and ceremonial occasions, as well as adventurous training and

sporting opportunities. Boys attend weekend camps in Ballykinlar, Magilligan and across England. The contingent currently consists of an Army section and an RAF section, with over 120 boys regularly participating in CCF training.

Duke of Edinburgh Award

The DofE Award Scheme aligns perfectly with the School's core values of Excellence, Respect, and Participation. The programme is open to all students and is structured across three progressive levels: Bronze (Year 10), Silver (Years 11/12) and Gold (Year 12+). Each level demands greater commitment and perseverance, rewarding participants with a sense of accomplishment and recognition that is respected by universities and employers worldwide.

74th Belfast (RBAI) Scout Group

This opportunity is open to Beavers and Cubs at Inchmarlo as well as Scouts, Explorers, and Network at RBAI. The Scout Group is looking forward to its centenary in 2026 and is planning several exciting events, ranging from a Gala Ball in Belfast City Hall to an international Summer Camp. The Group has a long-standing and successful partnership with the DofE Award Scheme, where boys can achieve their Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards, which enable them to obtain their Chief Scout's Gold, Platinum, Diamond, and King's Scout Awards.





Pastoral Care

Care for the development, well-being and progress of all pupils is fundamental to RBAI. The pastoral care provision integrates with and gives coherence to the many and diverse, different aspects of each pupil's school experience, enabling them to gain the maximum benefit from their time at RBAI.

While pastoral care is the primary responsibility of the pastoral staff, tutors and housemasters, all staff within the school community have a responsibility to promote good practice. All members of staff are obliged to contribute to establishing and maintaining an ethos which is characterised by a commitment to care, open access, relationships of trust and cooperation.

Well-being at RBAI is based on the PERMA-V model devised by Dr Martin Seligman. Its framework and its corresponding values underpin a programme of activities on well-being, helping pupils to develop Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Achievement and Vitality.

School Community

RBAI maintains strong links with parents, alumni, and the wider Belfast community, with service and leadership at the heart of school life. The Instonian alumni also play an active role in supporting pupils through careers talks, mentoring, coaching and providing work experience. The RBAI Foundation raises funds to support the development of the School and acts as a hub for communication with 8,000 Instonians around the world, hosting alumni events across the UK and overseas, as well as promoting the Belfast Old Instonians Association (BOIA) annual dinners in Belfast, Edinburgh and London.

Governance & Leadership

RBAI is governed by the Scheme of Endowment established on 28th December 1888 and framed under the Educational Endowments (Ireland) Act 1885. A Board of Governors is elected by the Members of the Institution to govern and manage the School. Governors are elected from within the membership of the Institution. Representative Governors are elected to serve for a term of three years. Co-opted Governors with a specialist interest in education are appointed to serve for a term of three years. Teacher Governors are elected from and by the body of permanent teaching staff in the organisation for a period of four years. Parent Governors are elected from and by the body of parents/guardians of pupils enrolled in the School, including the Preparatory Department, for a period of four years.





The Role

The Principal agrees during the employment:

- To be responsible for the leadership of the School and the internal organisation and management of the teaching staff;
- To exercise such powers and perform such duties and observe such restrictions and undertake such responsibilities as may from time to time be assigned to the Principal by or under the authority of the Governors;
- To liaise closely with the Bursar, to enable them to report directly to the Chair of the Board of Governors, and to ensure the effective transaction of the School's administrative and business arrangements;
- To use their utmost endeavours to promote the interests and reputation of the School, including Inchmarlo, in such manner as the Governors acting reasonably shall direct;
- To promote relationships between the School, its parents, the wider Instonian Community and the various external agencies;
- To shape the ethos of the School, establish standards of behaviour and discipline for pupils and teaching staff and ensure that these are followed, and to implement the overall aims and objectives and policies of the Governors and keep the same under review;
- To advise and assist the Governors in the exercise of their functions, including attending meetings of the Governors and making such reports to them (both orally and in writing), in connection with the Principal's functions as the Governors may require.
- To deploy and manage all teaching staff and allocate duties to them;
- To act in accordance with and execute the School's Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedures;
- To manage, monitor and supervise teaching staff as regards all their duties, to evaluate the standards of teaching and learning at the School, and to ensure that proper standards of professional performance are established, appraised and maintained;
- To coordinate and facilitate an ongoing programme of teaching staff development;
- To manage the implementation of an appropriate curriculum and timetable in conformity with the educational policies agreed with the Governors;
- To determine, in conjunction with the Governors, and ensure the implementation of a policy for the pastoral care of the pupils;
- To be available at all reasonable hours during normal school hours (except during normal school holidays and otherwise when properly absent) and at other reasonable times in case of emergency to Vice-Principals, Heads of Department and teaching staff;
- To advise on, in accordance with any written statement of general principles provided by the Governors, measures to be taken with a view to promoting among the pupils self-discipline and proper regard for authority, to encourage good behaviour of the pupils and otherwise to regulate the conduct of the pupils, to make such measures generally known within the School and to ensure that they are implemented;
- To ensure good order and discipline at all times when pupils are present on the school premises and whenever the pupils are engaged in authorised school activities, whether on school premises or elsewhere;
- To comply at all times with the Governors' policy on the discipline, suspension or expulsion of pupils, provided that no pupil shall be expelled by the Principal without prior consultation with the Chair of Governors (or in their absence, the Vice-Chair) and, in any event, to suspend or expel a pupil only after having acted fairly and having acted in accordance with all applicable legislative requirements.

The Person

To merit consideration for this highly responsible post, a candidate must:

- Have received a primary honours degree of first-class or 2:1 standard at a recognised British or Irish university or have demonstrated academic ability at a high level by the successful completion of a higher degree;
- Demonstrate experience of senior management at an HMC school or institution of a comparable academic standard, coupled with a deep involvement in the pursuit of excellence, innovation and progressiveness in all aspects of school life, both academic and co-curricular;
- Have a working knowledge of school finance and an awareness and empathy with the role of a School Bursar;
- Have the ability to integrate with and relate to staff, pupils, parents and alumni.





Terms & Conditions

The terms of employment offered are as follows:

- The successful candidate's core remuneration will be at the appropriate level determined by the Northern Ireland Department of Education for a post of this importance;
- The new Principal will be placed on an individual salary range within the Department's Group 7 category, which can extend – depending on the size of the school – from Point 31 to Point 37;
- In addition, it is open to the Governors to supplement the departmentally approved basic scale with a discretionary 'superscale' payment;
- In addition to the basic salary range supplemented by the Governors' discretionary allowance, the Board would provide BUPA or other private medical insurance cover for the Principal and his/her immediate family;
- The precise total remuneration offer will depend on the experience and qualities of the successful candidate;
- Only that part of the remuneration paid under the Department's 'points scale' will rank for TPS purposes;
- Governors will reimburse the Principal to meet the reasonable cost of appropriate entertainment and will, of course, meet travelling expenses for school business;
- The Principal is required to become a contributory member of the local Teachers' Superannuation Scheme. Reciprocal arrangements exist for aggregating service and pension rights under that Scheme and corresponding Schemes in Great Britain and certain other countries.

Application Process

The search for a new Principal for The Royal Belfast Academical Institution is being led by RSAcademics, and the new post-holder will be selected by a panel chaired by Mr Michael Howard, Chair of Governors.

Interested candidates are invited to contact RSAcademics to arrange a confidential discussion with one of the consultants handling this appointment:

- Helen Flower, Search Consultant:
helenflower@rsacademics.com
- Charlotte Faber, Senior Advisor:
charlottefaber@rsacademics.com

Closing date: 10.00am on Monday 10 November 2025.

Applications should be made electronically to RSAcademics. To submit your application, please upload your documents according to the instructions on the **RSAcademics website** via the Apply Now link accompanying the announcement of the position. You will be taken to an online portal where you will be able to download an application form. Please follow the instructions provided to complete and submit your application.

You should submit the following (both in PDF format):

- A completed application form (available alongside this candidate information on the **RSAcademics website**);
- A covering letter addressed to Michael Howard, Chair of Governors. The letter should explain your reasons for applying.

If you have any questions about uploading your application documents, please contact Alison Hooper, Project Manager (Leadership Appointments), at **applications@rsacademics.com**. Alison can also be reached by calling our Head Office on +44 (0) 204 6269 791.

The process is as follows:

- When you submit your application, you will receive an automated email from RSAcademics confirming that we have received it. If you have not received acknowledgement that your application has been received within two working days of sending it, please email us at **applications@rsacademics.com** or contact us by telephone at +44 (0) 204 6269 791;
- **Preliminary interviews** will take place with RSAcademics via Teams on Monday 17 and Friday 21 November 2025;
- **Longlist interviews** with the Governors' panel will take place online on Monday 1 December 2025;
- **Shortlist interviews** with the Governing Body will take place at the School on Monday 8 and/or Tuesday 9 December 2025 (TBC).

N.B. Safer recruitment checks will be made at all stages in the recruitment process.



Founded in 2001 by Russell Speirs, RSAcademics has advised and supported over 700 schools and educational organisations in the UK and worldwide. Through our working partnerships with heads, leadership teams, boards, staff and parents, we specialise in supporting schools in five main areas: strategy, marketing and research; equality, diversity and inclusion; operational improvement; leadership and governance and philanthropy. We enable schools worldwide to thrive by finding and developing senior leaders, guiding decision makers, making connections and shaping debate. We are known for the calibre and spirit of our people. We exist entirely to serve schools because we believe that the world needs thriving schools. RSAcademics is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in schools. Please visit www.rsacademics.com for more information.