



Information for member schools

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The ISC, 27 Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1H 9BU

www.isc.co.uk

www.schoolstogether.org

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The role of the ISC

Welcome to the ISC! The ISC is based in a small office in central London and was constituted in 1974 by Associations representing heads, bursars and governing bodies to provide a single, unified voice that speaks on behalf of member schools across the UK. It is a coordinating, umbrella body providing a vital link between the independent education sector and government policy. It brings [the Associations](#): AGBIS, GSA, HMC, ISA, IAPS, ISBA and the Society of Heads along with affiliates BSA, COBIS, SCIS and WISC together around the table to achieve collective vision, voice and representation as a trade body. The ISC Board meets four times per year and the execs of all Associations meet monthly to raise and share issues of common concern. The ISC represents the sector as a whole and is in a unique position to speak on behalf of all 1,350+ members, seeking to support, inform and promote the sector, rebutting untruths and explaining the value of independent education to wider society. The ISC is the central ambassador for independent education and works with ministers, political parties, the inspectorate, unions, civil servants and public sector bodies, sitting on a large variety of committees so that schools and Associations can be connected through an existing network of contacts and their voices be heard. In maintaining good working relationships, the ISC communicates the strengths and value of the sector's schools and demonstrates the importance of the independent sector to overall education provision and in supporting parental choice.

The ISC engages on specific topic areas through expert groups, including cross-sector partnerships; safeguarding and child welfare; community action; digital strategy; communications and also equalities, diversity and inclusion. These groups help inform strategy, messaging and government consultations so that the priorities of member schools are properly represented. Further information on these groups is available [here](#).

The ISC's main value is in providing a collective voice for the sector's schools. To that end, the ISC has three core areas of work:

- 1) Research and data collection and analysis - The ISC's sector-specific data collection through its annual Census survey, public attitudes polling and other research projects, informs sector messaging and can be used by all Associations and schools (see sector info page on www.isc.co.uk).
- 2) Media and communications - Promoting and defending the sector in the national media, representing the interests of association member schools. We aim to be a proactive and positive voice in the education debate, highlighting the true nature of our sector's schools and their public benefit activity while also rebutting unfair accusations and dispelling myths.
- 3) Policy and public affairs – As an association of Associations, we connect day to day issues and concerns for schools with policy development, coordinate sector responses to consultations, and monitor the political and news agenda. The ISC regularly feeds back important information on trends and issues and government guidelines to schools.

The ISC is a small team with each member working across these three functions. We do this to:

- 1) Ensure that there is some balance and fairness in the presentation of information about independent schools.
- 2) Represent the interests of independent education and balance the national media debate, showing how the existence of independent schools contributes positively to society and to education more broadly. Communications link the data and policy work together into internal and external messaging so that it gets used effectively.

- 3) Get the best possible outcomes on policy and on the political agenda for independent schools.

Further information on the ISC's objectives can be found [here](#).

How to get to the ISC office

The ISC office is a one-minute walk from St James's Park tube station (Circle and District lines) and a ten-minute walk from Victoria station (Circle, District, Victoria and National Rail).

A map pinpointing the ISC office can be viewed [here](#) along with the ISC's address and contact details. The ISC meeting room is available for schools to use free of charge. More information on this can be found [below](#).

ISC staff

A list of ISC staff, jobs roles and contact information can be found [here](#).

What is an ISC school and how to become one?

Although 'ISC schools' do not exist *per se*, the phrase is used as shorthand for schools in membership of an Association whose subscriptions support the ISC. These schools can be found on the ISC's website www.isc.co.uk. A list of the Associations is available [here](#).

To be a member of the ISC, the school's head must be a full member of a [heads Association](#), the school must be fee-charging and located in the UK or the Republic of Ireland and cater for pupils aged between five and 18 years.

ISC subscriptions are levied on each member Association by reference to the numbers and ages of pupils at schools in England and Wales within that Association. For schools in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Eire there is a flat rate subscription and the subscriptions of the reference associations reflect this accordingly. These schools pay smaller subs to reflect that the ISC's lobbying work is focussed in England. Further detail on ISC subscriptions can be found [here](#). (Member Zone login required.)

Information on Association membership types can be read [here](#). If a school ceases to be a member of a heads Association but remains a member of AGBIS they will remain a member of the ISC for one year. After that they will cease to be a member unless they have joined one of the other heads Associations or re-joined their previous one.

When a school becomes a full member of a heads Association, the Association informs the ISC. At this point details of the school are added to the ISC database.

Creating your school page on the ISC websites

When an Association informs the ISC of a new member school, we create a school profile on behalf of the school on the main ISC website (isc.co.uk) and the Schools Together website (schoolstogether.org). At that point we contact the school with a link to the page asking them to log in to the [ISC Member Zone](#) to add any additional information. As many employees at a school can sign up to the Member Zone as required. New users can sign up [here](#). By editing and adding information about your school through the Member Zone you are updating content on both the main ISC website (isc.co.uk) and Schools Together (schoolstogether.org). The Member Zone also provides useful information for member schools. If you would be interested in finding out more please contact web@isc.co.uk

The school search and parental enquiries

The [school search](#) is unique in that it is used by parents and guardians to search across all 1,350+ member schools whilst being free for users to use. All schools that are members of the ISC can be found using the search. In 2020, the parts of the ISC website aimed at parents such as the school search and school profile pages received three million page views.

An email is sent to all schools every fortnight if their school has been viewed in that time period by an individual who wishes to forward their contact details on to that school. We do this to help schools find prospective pupils and to make the search more useful for parents and guardians. The school can then login to the secure ISC Member Zone from the email they received to view contact details for the parental enquiry.

The Schools Together website

The Schools Together (schoolstogether.org) website was created to provide examples of partnerships between ISC schools and state schools. These benefit tens of thousands of pupils every year and are wide-ranging. Collaborations include reading with younger pupils, preparing A-level pupils for higher education, sharing facilities and seconding teaching staff. The Schools Together website currently contains details of almost 6,000 of these partnerships providing examples of how state and independent schools work together to unlock new educational experiences for pupils and teachers. All ISC schools can add details of their partnership work through the [ISC Member Zone](#). If you have yet to sign up, you can do so [here](#). Partnerships appear in the partnership search and on the individual school's profile page. See an example of a school's partnership page [here](#).

When logged in to the [ISC Member Zone](#), schools can download a pdf document containing information about their school, their partnerships with other schools and the community, statistics on their collaborations with other schools and the financial assistance that they offer. This can be downloaded by the school and shared with others such as local MPs or to accompany your school's annual return to the Charity Commission, if relevant.

The ISC data portal

The ISC research team provide all schools with a login to the ISC data portal. The data portal can be accessed [here](#). Schools can use the data portal to view useful research tools and to complete research surveys that the ISC carries out such as the ISC annual Census. If your school requires a login, please email research@isc.co.uk

The ISC Census

The ISC annual Census is the only detailed census of the independent sector and is used by schools, Associations, and other education sector organisations as a reliable source of information. It is a key report that provides the information which supports the work we carry out. It is the only mandatory piece of research for member schools to complete. More information on the Census is available [below](#) in the Research section. The Census from past years can be viewed on the ISC website [here](#). Schools complete the Census through the ISC data portal. Information on accessing the ISC data portal is available [above](#).

Research tools for schools

The research and data team has developed several tools to help schools. All tools are accessed via the password protected ISC data portal. Information on accessing the ISC data portal is available [above](#). The tools available to schools include the Census data viewer, the parent survey data viewer and the economic impact tool. Further information on these is available [here](#).

Accessing communications

All school heads are added to the distribution lists for the ISC Monthly Report newsletter and ISC alerts. Some of the links within the newsletter and alerts require the reader to log in to the ISC Member Zone to open them and view the content. You can sign up to the ISC Member Zone [here](#). Additional school staff can also receive the ISC Monthly Report newsletter, to do this they need to sign up to the Member Zone [here](#). By signing up to the Member Zone they will also be added to the distribution list for the [ISC Daily News Summary](#) and will receive parental enquiry emails. Information on parental enquiries can be found [above](#). Communications and marketing staff in schools can easily sign up to receive ISC call-outs for case studies, information about high-level press issues and details of media opportunities by sending their contact details to press@isc.co.uk.

Websites and social media

The ISC's websites:

- The ISC main website www.isc.co.uk
The ISC website has been developed with parents and schools in mind. In the Member Zone, schools will find a range of helpful documents and resources to support their work.
- The ISC Schools Together website www.schoolstogether.org

- The ISC Initial Teacher Training website iscteachertraining.co.uk

Twitter handles:

@isc_schools

@schoolstogether

@JulieR_isc

@barnabylenon

Hashtags: #schoolstogether, #powerofpartnerships

We share content from schools thorough our social media platforms.

LinkedIn

[ISC](#)

Facebook

[ISC](#)

ISC departments

Policy and public affairs

The Policy and Public Affairs Team

The ISC's policy and public affairs team is responsible for managing relationships with government departments and parliament and developing the ISC's position on national policy matters.

Communications with schools flows both ways. Updates on government policy are regularly communicated out to schools through the ISC's Monthly Report and specific email alerts (particularly on evolving school arrangements during the COVID pandemic). Meanwhile, the ISC and Associations will seek views from schools on government consultations to inform policy decisions that impact the sector.

Please contact publicaffairs@isc.co.uk if you would like to discuss anything further.

Policy

Relationships with the Government

The ISC works with ministers and officials across departments – primarily the Department for Education, Home Office, and Department for International Trade (on education exports).

In addition to one-to-one contacts, the ISC also sits on government advisory groups to represent the sector and to gain intelligence – for example the Home Office Education Advisory Group which discusses immigration matters. Relationships are also maintained with wider stakeholders within the sector including ISI and Ofqual.

Developing policy for the sector

The policy team develops sector policy positions based on views from our member Associations and individual schools. These views are presented to government via conversations, letters, and more formal submissions to consultations. This covers a range of issues affecting schools, including making

the case against punitive policies (e.g. taxation) and representing the sector's view on issues such as the TPS and immigration.

For example, during the debates with the Labour Party in 2019 on the future of the sector, the ISC brought together a cross-sector group to develop advice and guidance for member schools. A key part of the policy and public affairs team's work at that time was also to develop a positive narrative around the sector (with a focus on partnership work) and formulate the arguments/rebuttal to defend independent schools against our critics.

Public affairs

ISC's public affairs role

As part of our role in protecting and promoting independent schools, the ISC provides a public affairs service for all Associations and schools, as well as for the sector as a whole. Public affairs work involves managing our relationship with politicians of all parties, at all levels. It also involves monitoring of government and political announcements, research on MPs and policymakers, and providing intelligence for Associations and schools.

National public affairs

The ISC represents schools and the sector on the national stage to government departments, ministers, think tanks, and politicians. This central point of contact is vital, ensuring that politicians can get information quickly from a single source, speaking credibly for the whole sector.

The ISC's national work involves meeting and briefing politicians in Westminster, in both the Lords and Commons. We aim to show that independent schools are part of the wider education sector, that we can contribute to political priorities on education, and that we are a valuable educational asset. This is intended both to encourage a positive understanding of the sector among politicians, as well as to discourage support for financial threats to the sector.

Additionally, the ISC acts as the Secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Independent Education. This APPG, chaired by Andrew Lewer MBE MP, brings together politicians from all political parties to discuss issues affecting independent schools. This allows effective briefing of politicians, as well as presenting an opportunity for Associations and schools to present to the APPG.

Public affairs support for member schools

Schools are the most powerful public affairs asset for making a positive impression on MPs. Therefore, the ISC is keen to work with schools to encourage good relationships with local MPs, and provide any assistance needed for this. We can provide research and briefings for schools wanting to begin a relationship with their local MP, and we provide a number of template letters in the [ISC Member Zone](#). We are also available for any specific guidance or queries you may have on relationships with local politicians.

ISC public affairs works most effectively when they are able to brief and assist schools engaging their local MP, and when they are aware of any pre-existing relationship before briefing MPs in Westminster. Therefore, schools are encouraged to contact ISC with queries or intelligence from their conversations with local MPs, and any other politicians.

Research

The team

The research and data team carry out research on behalf of member schools and Associations to help the ISC's aims of promoting and defending the sector. Most research projects are carried out at no additional cost to member schools.

Annual research

Annual Census – the ISC annual Census is the largest piece of research the team carries out. It is the only mandatory piece of research for member schools. While the census day itself is in January, preparation for the census begins in October and data checking and analysis continues through February and into March. The final physical report is published towards the end of April, with each school receiving one free copy - copies are also sent to Associations. It is the only detailed census of the independent sector and is used by schools, Associations, and other education sector organisations as a reliable source of information.

Exam results – Year 13 (A-level, AS-level, Extended Project, Pre-U, International Baccalaureate, and BTEC) and Year 11 (GCSE and International GCSE) results are collected from member schools in August. Schools can permit their individual results to be published on the ISC website and in the press, which is used by some newspapers (Times, Telegraph) to create “league tables” (though it should be stressed that the ISC does not support the concept of exam “league tables”) The ISC also publishes an analysis of the aggregate results, informing schools of trends.

Medical Schools Survey – a review of the latest entry requirements and other course details for UK medical schools, identifying changes to requirements that are or could be detrimental to applicants. This survey is carried out in July/August.

Oxbridge Survey – a survey funded separately by the GSA/HMC Universities Committee that surveys GSA and HMC member schools' experience of the Oxbridge application and interview process. Its purpose is to identify trends to ensure that the independent sector is being treated fairly and to feed back to Oxbridge reports of unusual experiences. This survey is carried out in March/April.

UCAS Offers Survey – a survey funded separately by the GSA/HMC Universities Committee that collects UCAS application data from GSA and HMC member schools and reports on offer rates, offer types, and other trends in the UCAS application process. This survey is carried out in May/June.

Bespoke research for independent schools and associations

The research and data team investigate bespoke research that could be carried out based on the needs of the sector. While the annual research calendar is very busy, the team attempts to carry out one piece of research each year that is not carried out annually.

These are the most recent pieces of bespoke research carried out or commissioned by the research team.

Parent Survey – carried out approximately every four to five years, it surveys parents about how and why they chose their current school, fee flexibility, and source(s) of funding for fees. The survey also profiled parents by factors including how long they had been purchasers of independent education, profession, and gross household income. Last carried out in 2016.

Economic impact report – commissioned every five years from Oxford Economics. A survey of the impact of the sector on the UK economy. Last carried out in 2017 (with report published in 2018).

Satisfaction Survey – carried out in 2018 and surveyed heads, bursars and other senior staff as to their awareness of and satisfaction with work carried out by ISC departments.

Academic “value added” – commissioned from the Centre of Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) at Durham University in 2016. The research analyses the academic “value added” made by pupils entering the independent sector at various stages in their education.

Soft skills “value added” – research carried out in partnership with AQR International in 2017 to analyse the soft skills “value added” by the independent sector using a concept known as ‘mental toughness’.

Tools

The research and data team make several tools available to help schools. All tools are accessed via the password protected ISC data portal. Information on how to access the data portal can be found [above](#).

Census Data Viewer – a tool that allows schools to see trends in their own school’s census data compared to a self-selected benchmarked group of schools. The main purpose of the tool is strategic planning. An association version of the tool is available to view aggregated data for all schools in membership.

Parent Survey Data Viewer – a tool similar to the Census Data Viewer that allows schools to view their results of the parent survey (if they participated) and view the overall results set.

Economic Impact Tool – a spreadsheet-based tool that allows schools to enter financial data and retrieve the financial impact the school has on the local economy. Uses data from the Economic Impact Survey. The results can be used to help schools engage with their local MP and other elected officials, as well as inform external messaging.

Bespoke data requests

The team also responds to data requests submitted to the research inbox. Requests are submitted by Associations, schools, educational researchers, and other third parties. Requests are also made by journalists, but these are handled through the communications team.

Contact details

Please contact research@isc.co.uk for if you would like to discuss any research related matter.

Media and communications

The team

The ISC media and communications team works closely with all of the ISC departments, as well as the chairman and CEO, in order to help develop the organisation’s internal and external communications. Taking its lead from Board-approved strategies, the team is responsible for various channels of communications (see more detailed notes below).

Press and media

The team is the first port of call for press enquiries and managing media moments and issues. The team deal with journalists and broadcasters – crafting [press statements and releases](#), both reactive and proactive (with input from relevant colleagues) and support spokespeople with briefings, which include key messages and response lines, for broadcast opportunities. The comms team also manages the press side of major ISC calendar moments, primarily the Census publication and release of exam results data. The ISC's latest agreed messaging is available from press@isc.co.uk

ISC publications

The team produces the annual Celebrating Partnerships booklet, showcasing just some of the many mutually beneficial cross-sector partnership projects – its primary audience is politicians and influencers within education. They are also responsible for the biannual Bulletin for schools, which contains useful and informative commentaries from ISC team members - as well as external contributors - about a range of issues of interest to school leaders. ISC comms has also produced a pocket booklet busting myths about independent schools, and the team supports the production of ad-hoc publications such as The Missing 2,000 and Transforming Young Lives: Fundraising for Bursaries. View [ISC's publications here](#).

Social media and ISC blogs

Under direction from the ISC Board, the comms team has in recent years invested more energy than previously in developing content and reach on social media – specifically Twitter (@isc_schools and @schoolstogether), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#). This has included producing more video content and using third party platforms to create more eye-catching and engaging content. Social media is the channel through which we can most regularly promote key themes and core messages. The ISC comms team regularly encourages schools to submit blogs for publication on the ISC website in order to give a platform for school leaders to provide opinion on topical issues or help to promote messages of importance to the sector. ISC blogs can be viewed [here](#).

Daily News Summary (DNS)

The ISC [Daily News Summary](#) is a daily email rounding up important education news stories judged to be of interest to schools. Its audience continues to increase and is now circulated to just over 8,500 subscribers. While primarily for schools in membership of one or more of the ISC's constituent Associations, the DNS is available for members of the public to subscribe to. Currently, there is roughly a 50/50 split between 'school' subscribers and 'public' subscribers. Users can subscribe to the Daily News Summary when signing up to the Member Zone [here](#).

Internal communications

The team supports the production of all internal ISC messages to association member schools, primarily the Monthly Report email and bespoke email alerts on urgent/high level topics - such as the series of COVID-19 alerts the ISC has been sending to schools during the pandemic. It also manages a contact list of more than 250 members of staff who work in communications roles at independent schools, which is sent information such as national press opportunities and ISC case study requests. If your communications staff would like to be added to the mailing list email press@isc.co.uk

Communications Working Group (CWG)

The ISC's head of media and communications chairs the CWG, which is made up of the communications leads at all of the ISC's constituent Associations plus BSA, SCIS, COBIS and GDST. The group discusses high-level communications issues and opportunities for the sector, and puts

forward actions for the ISC to take forward. Minutes of the CWG meetings, which take place once per term, are shared with association Executives.

Contact details

Please contact press@isc.co.uk if you would like to discuss any communications related matter.

Booking the meeting room

It is free for the Associations to book a meeting room at the ISC office. Schools who are members of the Associations with a profile page on the ISC website are also able to book the meeting rooms at no cost. Information on how to book a meeting room is available [here](#). You will need to have [signed up](#) and [logged in](#) to the ISC Member Zone to view this page. Alternatively, to book a meeting room email ceo@isc.co.uk.



Constituent Associations

Girls' Schools Association, Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference
Independent Associations of Prep Schools, Independent Schools Association
The Society of Heads, Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools
The Independent Schools' Bursars Association

Affiliated Associations

Boarding Schools' Association, Council of British International Schools
Scottish Council of Independent Schools, Welsh Independent Schools Council

Independent Schools Council

First Floor, 27 Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1H 9BU

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