

Candidate brief for the position of University Secretary The Open University

September 2019



The Open
University

50
YEARS

Contents

About The Open University	3
Mission and Strategy	6
Student Success	7
Finances and Key Statistics	8
The Role	9
The Person	11
How to Apply	12

About The Open University

The Open University (OU) is the largest university in the UK by student population and has a significant global reach through a network of alumni in over 150 countries, international partnerships and research. The OU is the only university to receive funding from, and operate in, all four nations of the UK.

The OU was established in 1969 with a unique aim. Our mission was to provide a new style of university education that was truly open to people, places, methods and ideas, to improve lives and enrich communities in the UK and across the world. We are currently celebrating our 50th year as the most well-known and highly-regarded distance learning provider in the world. Since our foundation, two million people have studied with us, and our commitment to our mission is as strong as ever. That's why we continue to evolve and adapt our teaching methods and technology to support student success in a rapidly changing world.

A unique institution

The OU is unique. A world leader in open access, supported open learning and open educational resources, our distance learning approach sets us apart from other universities. Our commitment to open entry requirements means the OU has an unrivalled reach and influence on today's society. Our flexible approach supports people of all ages and backgrounds to study and achieve their potential. Through academic research, teaching innovation and partnerships, the OU constantly breaks new ground in the design, content and delivery of supported open learning.

Open, ambitious, innovative and inclusive

We believe anyone, anywhere, can study with The Open University. Around 174,000 students are currently studying with us, and these include:

- Around 24,000 disabled students.
- 1,500 students in prison or other secure environments.
- Students sponsored by FTSE 100 companies and major public services like the police and the NHS.
- In excess of 1,000 students on apprenticeship courses.



Some other highlights include:

- An overall satisfaction rate of 87% in the latest National Student Survey.
- A unique partnership with the BBC since 1971 and co-production of approximately 35 prime-time TV and radio series every year. During 2017/18, OU-BBC TV and radio programmes were listened to or viewed 351 million times, including the flagship Blue Planet II series.
- We have grown our Massive Open Online Courses, provided through the University's subsidiary company, FutureLearn Limited, to 20.6 million registrations from 8.2 million learners across the world.
- Free-to-use courses and modules on our OpenLearn in-house platform received 7.8m views in 2017/18.
- Being one of the top three space science centres in the UK.
- Providing free educational resources to teachers and healthcare workers in sub-Saharan Africa and India, reaching over two million people.
- A Business School that is part of the top 1% of global business schools who are triple accredited by the world's leading management education associations.



Values

Our c. 9,000 staff stay true to a clearly defined set of core values. First, we are inclusive, playing a unique role in society by making higher education open to all and promoting social justice through the development of knowledge and skills. Second, we are innovative, leading the learning revolution, placing innovation at the heart of its teaching and research, continuously seeking new and better ways to inspire and enable learning, and creating world class research and teaching. Third, we are responsive to the needs of individuals, employers and communities, and dedicated to supporting our students' learning success.

Location

The University has its headquarters on a purpose-built campus of approximately 110 acres in the south-east of Milton Keynes. It also has national headquarters in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast and Dublin, and bases in Manchester and Nottingham.

Leadership and governance

The University is a chartered institution and received its Royal Charter on 23 April 1969. It is an exempt charity registered in England and Wales and regulated on behalf of the Charity Commission by the Office for Students. It is also registered as a charity in Scotland.

The University's governing body is the Council, which focuses on the University's overall strategy, finances, property and staff, and is supported by a number of subcommittees, such as Finance and Audit Committees. The Council has the ultimate authority within the OU, but it has to respect the views of the Senate in academic matters. The Senate is the academic authority of the University, responsible for academic strategy, policy, priorities and performance. In October 2019, Professor Tim Blackman succeeds Professor Mary Kellett as Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor is accountable to the Council for maintaining and promoting the efficiency and good order of the University. The University's Chancellor is Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho and its Pro-Chancellor (who also chairs the Council) is Malcolm Sweeting.



More information on the OU's leadership and existing structure can be found [here](#).

Mission and Strategy

The Open University's mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. Our key strategic priority is student success.

Mission

We promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. Through academic research, pedagogic innovation and collaborative partnership we seek to be a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open learning.

Most of our undergraduate courses have no formal entry requirements. We believe that the qualifications our students have when they leave are the only ones that matter. We are committed to promoting equal opportunities for all, and close monitoring makes sure that we live up to our ideals.

Our [Annual Reports](#) provide a record of our work, events, projects and financial highlights year by year. More information on the OU's Mission and Academic Strategy can be found [here](#).

Strategy

Through our scale, reach and our ability to support students to succeed we achieve a positive impact on society and the economy. This includes:

- Understanding our students' study goals and ensuring they get onto the right study path at the right level.

- Supporting our students to successfully progress through and complete their chosen module(s) or qualification.
- Delivering a high quality and flexible student experience with high levels of student satisfaction.
- Supporting students to achieve positive career and personal development outcomes.

The focus on student success is underpinned by a set of related objectives, which together will achieve our overall vision:

- Delivering excellent teaching and research to enhance our distinctiveness, reputation and, above all, student success.
- Enhancing our future growth and sustainability by diversifying our reach and sources of income and managing and challenging our cost base, to ensure our financial sustainability, headroom for re-investment back into the University, and value for our students
- Investing in technology that enables success – both student facing technology and our own internal systems.
- Fostering a dynamic and inclusive culture by investing in staff to recognise and maximise their contribution to our success.

More information on the OU's Strategic Objectives can be found [here](#).

Student Success

Student success is central to everything the OU does. Our degree ceremonies are always the highlight of the university year because they let us wholeheartedly celebrate the success of our students.

This year we celebrated with more than 8,000 graduates at 29 ceremonies in 14 locations. Those 8,000 were joined by over 26,000 guests – supportive family and friends who cheered, clapped, whistled and whooped during each event. And we conferred 34 honorary degrees.

OU students are represented by the OU Students Association. Run by students, for students, it ensures that the student voice is heard. The OU Students Association works with the University to ensure that students are involved as partners in shaping their studies. Although OU students learn at a distance, we work to ensure they all have the opportunity to be involved in giving their views on the curriculum or institutional change and development.

Student Profiles

There is no typical OU student. People of all ages and backgrounds study with us, for all sorts of reasons:

- To update their skills, get a qualification, boost their career, change direction, prove themselves, or keep mentally active.
- 76% of directly registered OU students work full- or part-time during their studies.
- 23% of OU UK undergraduates live in the 25% most deprived areas.
- 34% of new OU undergraduates are under 25.

We are the largest provider of higher education for people with disabilities:

- 24,709 students with disabilities studied with us in 2017/18.
- Our open admissions policy helps thousands of people who failed to achieve their potential earlier in life.
- 34% of students had one A level or a lower qualification at entry.

Student Stories

The OU's students have some remarkable personal stories. For example:

[Fatema](#) fled from her home country of Bangladesh to Cyprus at 16 without finishing school. Investing all of her time in daily survival, she never had the opportunity to resume her schooling. Upon hearing about The Open University and its open to all policy, she enrolled on a Social Work course.

[John](#) grew up in Cardiff and was unable to read or write. He reached his mid-30s having never read a book, and it was later discovered he has severe dyslexia, ADHD, and Meares-Irlen syndrome. Despite these challenges, John graduated with an OU Science Degree at the age of 46. Read more student stories [here](#).

Finances and Key Statistics

In 2017/18 the OU had 174,898 students (64,914 full time equivalent). Total income was £424m, of which £271m came from tuition fees and education contracts, £101m from funding body grants, and £14m from research grants and contracts. The University receives funding from the Office for Students (OfS) in England, and the funding bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but its principal financial regulator for all the nations is fulfilled by OfS. The majority of its expenditure is on its staff and the infrastructure to support distance part-time education. The University has a strong balance sheet with substantial reserves. A programme of agreed strategic change driven cost-reduction measures will support delivery of the OU's financial strategy for financial sustainability. The strength of the reserves has enabled the investment in strategic change to build for our future to be done without recourse to external funding.

Full Annual Reports and Financial Statements can be found [here](#).

Key Statistics

The Open University has spent almost 50 years inspiring learning and creating higher educational opportunities with no barriers to entry. We continue to demonstrate excellence in research and teaching and achieve enormous reach through use of open access educational resources and our partnership with the BBC.

Growing our attractiveness to students

- We increased the number of students studying with us to a level last seen in 2013/14 and improved our student satisfaction score in 2018 National Students Survey.

Gaining External Endorsement of the excellence of our Teaching and Learning.

- We secured continuance of triple accreditation for our MBA, keeping us in the top 1% globally, and we have excelled in all our professional programme reaccreditation and quality assurance assessments.

Extending our reach

- We remain the largest University in the UK and one of the largest in Europe in terms of student numbers. We grew online courses provided through the University's subsidiary company, FutureLearn Limited, to 20.6 million registrations from 8.4 million learners across the world, and we offer a growing number of Higher Level Apprenticeships.

Enhancing our multiple media channels

Use of our multiple media channels continues to grow. Total downloads from The Open University iTunes U service reached 72 million, video views of Open University content on YouTube reached 50 million, and there were 7.8 million unique visits to the University's open educational resource website, OpenLearn. We achieved significant recognition for programmes including Blue Planet II, The Prosecutors, and The NHS at 70.

Extending our global footprint

- We continue to work in partnership with internal development agencies to deliver life-changing educational programmes across three continents.

Building for our future

- We commenced an ambitious and far reaching programme of strategic change to enhance our students' experience and interaction with the University, and to upgrade and improve our student facing support systems and processes.

The Role

Principal Responsibilities of the role

The role of University Secretary at the OU is an outstanding career opportunity for a talented leader who wants to make a difference to the services that underpin the University's mission to transform lives. It is a challenging and immensely rewarding role, on a scale matched by few other higher education institutions, and one of the most senior officers in the University. Under the Statutes, she or he is Secretary of the Council and the Senate, and reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

As well as the executive and managerial responsibilities detailed below, the University Secretary is responsible for the effective governance of the University and plays a vital role in providing support and independent advice to the Council and the Senate. The University Secretary takes overall responsibility on their behalfs for ensuring that the University has the systems and controls in place for complying with the highest standards of quality assurance and governance, as well as meeting the regulatory conditions required by the Office for Students in England, the funding bodies in the other nations of the United Kingdom and other regulators in the UK and abroad.

The University Secretary must have the experience, knowledge and skills to be a trusted adviser to the Vice-Chancellor and other senior colleagues, as well as to the Pro-Chancellor, who chairs the Council, and the other senior members of the Council and the Senate.

Executive and Managerial Responsibilities

The University Secretary is responsible for the effective and efficient operation, continuous improvement and development of professional services in the University, spanning a wide range of functions that may be subject to change from time to time. With a combined budget of £250m per annum, Professional Services are currently organised into the following units or functions:

- Academic Services. These include Access, Careers and Teaching Support; Assessment, Credit and Qualifications; Student Support Services; Student

Recruitment and Fees; and Open University Validation Partnerships, Student Policy & Casework;

- Learner & Discovery Services. These include learning and research resources, production of learning and teaching materials, overseeing the design and production of modules in collaboration with academic colleagues, and management of our partnership with the BBC;
- A Chief Information Officer portfolio including IT Services, Change & Improvement, Data & Student Analytics, Learning Experience & Technology and Strategic Technology Programmes;
- Estates and Facilities;
- Marketing & Communications;
- People Services;
- Internal Audit;
- University Secretary's Office. This includes Governance and Compliance; Data Strategy & Governance; Information Rights and Data Protection; and returns to our regulatory and funding bodies; and responsibility for emergency planning and business continuity.

The Directors of these units report to the University Secretary and are members of the University's senior team. In all these responsibilities, the University Secretary is supported by a Deputy University Secretary, an executive assistant and administrative officer support.

The University Secretary maintains a close relationship with the Chief Financial Officer (whose remit includes the University's growing commercial portfolio), the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the two Pro-Vice-Chancellors who have responsibility respectively for Students and for Research, Enterprise & Scholarship, and the three Nation Directors for Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Close connection and integration is also required with other key functions such as the Strategy Office, Government and External Affairs, and the Development Office, which fall within the Vice-Chancellor's office.

The University is implementing significant changes to support its future strategy and the University Secretary is responsible for leading significant elements of these changes with his or her Directors. These include a core systems replacement programme for legacy IT systems to

create improved business processes and enhance technology-led support throughout the student journey from first contact with the University through to completion of a qualification.

All the services within the University Secretary's portfolio work closely with the OU's Faculties, the Nations' offices, students primarily through the Open University Students Association (OUSA) and the Associate Lecturers, a group of about 4,000 staff who run the OU's tutorial groups, many of whom are homeworkers and are geographically distributed throughout the UK.

The University Secretary is a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Team, contributing significantly to the University's strategic direction, and also takes a key role on major committees. She or he must have the ability to play a full part in the overall management of the University, promote agreed strategies and support their implementation across the four Nations.

To ensure that the administrative and operational areas are effectively and efficiently managed to meet University objectives, the University Secretary has responsibility to:

- provide outstanding leadership and line management;
- ensure the effective development and implementation of the University's estate plans, ICT strategies, people strategies, marketing and communications, and academic, learner and discovery services;
- ensure joined up planning and performance review, resource deployment and risk management across Professional Services, working in support of the institution's priorities and in collaboration with academic and other areas of the institution;
- provide general oversight of Professional Services' financial planning and management (working closely with the Chief Financial Officer);
- ensure the maintenance of the internal control environment as well as institutional adherence with external regulatory and legal requirements;
- exercise responsibilities as the University's Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO);

- manage and appraise the leaders of the administrative functions with the aim of developing the leadership capability and management responsibility of staff, ensuring effective succession planning;
- lead a forum for all professional staff in the University, across both academic and professional services, in order to facilitate the sharing of best practice and a 'one university' approach to change and operational and administrative delivery against the institution's priorities.

Governance, Risk and Compliance

In order to fulfil her or his responsibilities for the effective governance of the University and its obligations of compliance with various regulatory duties, the University Secretary is supported by teams responsible for governance and compliance. The shape and scope of the team is evolving but includes institutional governance and its effective management, responsibilities for health and safety, fulfilling statutory data returns, data governance, data protection and information rights, and oversight of statutory duties such as the Prevent Duty to prevent terrorism, the Equality Duty to eliminate discrimination and advance equality, and UKVI requirements regarding visas and immigration.

The University Secretary is the Senior Information Risk Owner for the University and will oversee data protection and the Data Protection Officer.

The University Secretary also procures legal advice for the Council and Vice-Chancellor, manages the relationship between executive and Council members, and acts as the University liaison with appropriate external bodies (e.g. the Office for Students, the funding bodies in the Nations, and sector bodies like the Committee of University Chairs and Universities UK).

The Chief Auditor, responsible for internal audit, also reports to the University Secretary, and the integration and coordination of that work is an important responsibility for the office.

The Person

Knowledge and experience

- Outstanding leadership, motivation and development of senior managers across a diverse range of functions, preferably in a higher education environment;
- Significant experience of executive leadership in a large and complex student (or customer/user) facing organisation with relevant scale and breadth;
- A thorough understanding of - and high achievement in - how professional, administrative and operational activity can support meeting strategic objectives;
- Demonstrable understanding of the political, legal and regulatory HE environment, preferably across all four nations of the UK;
- A successful track record in leading and realising benefits from major change;
- The ability to articulate evidence-based strategy in an empowering, collegiate and inspiring way;
- Experience of working in a highly influential and sensitive role at the heart of an organisation interfacing with executive and non-executive members with influence over the institution's development;
- The ability to develop and maintain key networks and stakeholder relationships for institutional benefit;
- Experience of resource allocation, budgetary control and performance management at a high level.

Personal attributes

- A strong commitment to the mission and values of the University;
- The leadership and management skills required to inspire and motivate diverse professional, administrative and operational colleagues;
- Ability to use data to inform strategic decision-making;
- A strategic approach, though with the ability to deal with the detail when required;
- Ability to recognise and develop new ideas and bring others with you;
- Well-honed political and communication skills with a collegiate and collaborative style and the ability to manage conflicts of interest;
- Sound judgement and intuition;
- Resilient with the requisite energy levels for a demanding role;
- Integrity, openness and honesty, with a commitment to equality and diversity at all levels.

How to Apply

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to **The Open University** on this appointment.

Candidates should apply for this role through our website at www.saxbam.com/appointments, using code **ROVL**.

Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and cover letter.

The closing date for applications is noon on **14 October 2019**.

The OU particularly welcomes applications from black and minority ethnic candidates as they are under-represented at this level.

GDPR personal data notice

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please **do not** include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.

The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete as part of the application process.