Candidate brief for the position of Director, Learner and Discovery Services
Open University

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Dear Candidate,

Thank you very much for your interest in the Open University and in becoming the Director, Learner and Discovery Services.

The Open University was founded 50 years ago and has provided over 2 million people with an education that has enabled them to reach their potential and change their lives. Everyone who works for the University is animated by its powerful mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas and to enrich communities in the UK and around the world. Through academic research, teaching innovation and partnerships, the Open University constantly breaks new ground in the design, content, and delivery of supported open and distance learning. 175,000 students are currently studying with us, which makes us the largest university in the UK and one of the largest in Europe. We are the only university to operate in all four nations of the UK and also benefit from a network of alumni from over 150 different countries.

Learner and Discovery Services has been created to provide even greater focus on our principal strategy of securing student success, from the moment someone considers learning with us to the point where they celebrate their degree or qualification. Learner and Discovery Services brings together the hugely talented team of people who curate and provide access to educational and research resources, who develop and produce learning and teaching materials, and who, in collaboration with our academic colleagues, oversee the design and production of our modules. The team also manages our unique partnership with the BBC, including the delivery of landmark TV series like Blue Planet as well as many TV and radio co-productions.

If you have the ambition, vision, the skills and experience to lead 400 people to be at the centre of our next 50 years of learner-focused achievement, we will look forward to hearing from you. This is a distinctive role in a special institution with the opportunity to be at the centre of our life-changing mission.

We very much hope you will consider joining us.

Jonathan Nicholls
University Secretary
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. As we enter our fiftieth year, and with more than two million people who have studied with us, the 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 90% 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 11 series.
- 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 2 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. 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. 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 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.
Finances and Key Statistics

In 2018 the OU had 174,898 students (64,914 FTE). 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 remainder came from other sources.

The University has a strong balance sheet with substantial reserves. A programme of agreed cost-saving measures will provide current account surpluses from 2019/20. The reserves have enabled investment in strategic change to build for our future.

Full Annual Reports and Financial Statements can be found here. 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 have established are growing 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.
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.
This is a newly created portfolio with a collective budget of £33M and 400 staff.
Unit Summary
Key adjacencies and interdependencies: Faculties, Pro Vice Chancellor - Students, Chief Information Officer, Academic Services and other Professional Services

Commissioning, Broadcast and Partnerships – Director: James Davies
- Faculty relationship management (Commissioners)
- Module project management (Project Managers, Senior Project Manager and Projects & Control Team)
- BBC Relationship management and project delivery (Broadcast Partnerships)

Library Services – Interims: Gary Elliot-Cirigottis & Ann Davies
- Subject specialist librarians
- Content licensing and IP
- Digital capabilities
- Engagement
- Enquiries
- Research Support
- Digital Archive
- Library Systems

Open Media and Informal Learning (OMIL) – Director: James Davies
- Informal learning – platform and content (OpenLearn)
- Corporate and Commercial

Learning Design & Innovation – Director: Ian Jenkins
- Inform and support design of modules and qualifications
- Quality enhancement (e.g. Analytics 4 Action)
- Innovation leadership (e.g. OpenCreate)

Development & Production – Director: Ian Jenkins
- Module content development and delivery (Editorial)
- Video, audio, graphics, interactive assets (Rich Media)
- Digital and print fulfilment & support (Delivery)
The Role

Director, Learner and Discovery Services

Reporting to: University Secretary

Location: Milton Keynes

Reporting to the University Secretary and part of the Professional Services Portfolio, the Director, Learner and Discovery Services leads the transformation of services supporting teaching, learning and research at the Open University. This is an exciting opportunity to develop an ambitious vision for a unit able to enhance and enrich the learner experience across our formal, informal and commercial curriculum. Working closely with the PVC-Students and other senior leadership team members, the Director will lead an enabling service which plays a central role in ensuring that every learner is provided with an outstanding study experience and maximising student success.

The Director supports the University in being at the forefront of world-leading learning, teaching and research by delivering an outstanding and cohesive service at the core of academic activity (learning, teaching and research). Success of the service will centre on increasing discoverability of content, enhancing user experience and supporting skills development.

The Director will head one of the largest units of the University and is responsible for developing the leadership within the service to enable different ways of working together and to support agile multi-disciplinary and collaborative team-based working. The successful individual will maintain the high standards (on all levels) already reached within the existing units, whilst developing the newly formed Learner and Discovery Services to ensure that the combined elements work together to achieve even more for the University.

The Director will promote continuous improvement, innovation and agility in service delivery, and ensure that the University is at the forefront of world-leading student experience and support. Working in consultation and close partnership with faculties and other units, the Director will be responsible for establishing and developing collaborative relationships with Executive Deans, Nation Directors and other senior stakeholders to ensure all services are customer focussed, sector leading and deliver on the overall aims and objectives of the University at large.

Duties

To provide outstanding strategic leadership of Learner and Discovery Services as the University responds to new opportunities and challenges within a rapidly changing environment ensuring all services are delivered in a proactive learner-centred manner.

Strategic Direction

- Provide the vision and leadership of Learner and Discovery Services that ensures the University’s position as a leading provider of open and distance education is enhanced and developed.
- Build strategic relationships within the University and externally, to develop and implement effective strategies to support learning, teaching, research and scholarship activities, enriching the student experience and strengthening the capability of the University’s research goals.
• Drive and deliver change by regularly reviewing practices and developments to ensure ongoing improvements.
• Support the University’s competitive position by evaluating, enabling and promoting new developments (in areas such as digital capabilities, digital curation, Open Access, online communities) consistent with the aims and objectives of the University.

Leadership and people management

• Provide Learner and Discovery Services with high-quality and empowering leadership, setting and delivering the highest service standards and a strong performance culture by developing and sustaining best practice within the Unit.
• Foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement that encourages, engages and supports a high level of professional development and personal responsibility ensuring that Learner and Discovery Services contributes to successful outcomes for the University.
• Direct, inspire, motivate, engage and challenge managers to deliver flexible, responsive and relevant user-focused services to agreed performance and quality standards, deadlines and budgets.
• Ensure that Learner and Discovery Services operates in accordance with institutional policies and procedures, in particular those relating to equality & diversity, occupational health, health & safety, risk management, staff development, staff performance planning and review, DP/FOI and IT policies.
• Monitor performance and cost-effectiveness and ensure that decision making is based on the provision of high-quality management information.

Internal and external perspective

Internal:

• Actively contribute to the leadership aims and objectives of the University through support for institutional activities, involvement in committees and collaborative working and the promotion of agreed strategies, policies and objectives.
• Maintain effective relationships with Faculties and other Professional Services units to ensure a partnership approach and user-focused products and services.
• Build strong student engagement and develop relationships with the Open University Students Association (OU Students Association) that lead to delivery of the University’s strategic objectives.
• Actively engage students in the development of products and services.

External:

• Keep abreast of national and international initiatives in higher education, sharing connections and knowledge within Learner and Discovery Services and the wider University.
• Represent the University on national and international external consortium groups and boards and engage effectively in appropriate external networks, ensuring Learner and Discovery Services is able to compete, anticipate and meet new challenges.
The Person

The areas of knowledge, experience and personal attributes given below are not exhaustive, but highlight some of the most important qualities sought.

Part One – Knowledge, Skills and Experience

- You will have been educated to degree level or possess an equivalent qualification.
- Demonstrable leadership, strategic management and operational experience gained at a senior level in an area of high direct relevance to the Learner and Discovery Services remit, gained within higher education library or information services, or in an environment with strong synergies with the Open University’s operations.
- The expertise, knowledge and empathy to operate successfully within a distinctive, mission driven, collegial and high-impact academic environment, engendering the respect of both internal and external stakeholders.
- A collaborative leader with strategic acumen and problem-solving skills, able to inspire and motivate colleagues.
- Proven ability to manage complex budgets and resources with a track record of identifying and securing income from alternative sources and maximising the use of resources.
- A track record in directing and managing innovative change and continuous improvement, ensuring excellent organisational performance and outcomes.
- Strong interpersonal skills, with the ability to engage at all levels across a range of internal and external stakeholders and partners.
- Professional experience of blended learning approaches and digital technologies, with a depth of understanding of the needs of digital learners and the challenges of operating in an online environment.
- An understanding and awareness of the needs and demographics of OU students and the ability to deliver services that ensure an excellent student experience for all.

Part Two – Personal Attributes

- A commitment to the mission, values and ethos of the OU, underpinned by high personal integrity and a strong commitment to the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion at all levels throughout the institution.
- Able to build motivation, trust and respect throughout the OU community – students, staff, and leadership colleagues.
- Ability to build consensus and a sense of shared purpose and direction of travel within a newly configured organisation.
- Demonstrable creativity and a commitment to future-proofing service and delivery in an ever-changing environment.
Terms of Appointment

Salary: £87,772 - £101,047 plus benefits on offer

Location: Milton Keynes

The University has its UK headquarters on a purpose-built campus of approximately 110 acres in the south-east of Milton Keynes. Nearly 4,400 staff are based at the Milton Keynes Campus and in the national and regional centres across the UK and there are around 5,000 personal tutors. Milton Keynes is a modern, vibrant city with excellent cultural and visitor facilities. One quarter of the city area is parkland and Milton Keynes is in close proximity to beautiful countryside and villages. The city boasts exceptional transport links. It sits alongside the M1 and A5 and is 30-45 minutes by rail from London Euston.
How To Apply

The Open University has engaged the services of GatenbySanderson, to whom applications should be sent by noon on the closing date of Monday 8 April 2019. Following a longlist meeting of the Selection Panel, successful candidates will be invited to attend preliminary meetings with GatenbySanderson during the period 29 April and 2 May. Final interviews at the University are to be held on Monday 13 May 2019. Please note that the dates indicated on this timetable are pre-determined therefore should your application be successful you will be required to be available on the above listed dates.

In order to apply, please submit a CV with a covering letter setting out your interest in the role and details of how you match the required criteria in this Candidate Brief. Please include current salary details and the names and contact details of two referees, one of whom is your current/most recent employer. Referees will not be approached until the final stages and not without prior permission from candidates.

The preferred method of application is online at www.gatenbysanderson.com/job/GSe51000. If you are unable to apply online, please email your application to:

laura.charrington@gatenbysanderson.com
alison.elton@gatenbysanderson.com.

All applications will receive an automated response.
Any postal applications should be sent directly to:

Alison Elton
GatenbySanderson
12 Appold Street
London
EC2A 2AW

All candidates are also requested to complete an online Equal Opportunities Monitoring form which will be found at the end of the online application process. Any information collated from the equal opportunities monitoring form will not be used as part of the selection process and will be treated as strictly confidential.

For any enquiries, please contact our retained executive search partners – GatenbySanderson – Alison Elton 07785 614435 or Laura Charrington 07471 037070.