Candidate brief for the position of Director Academic Services
The Open University
April 2019
Contents

About The Open University 3
Mission and Strategy 6
Student Success 7
Finances and Key Statistics 8
Academic Services Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Role Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Person 13
How to Apply 13
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 II series.
- We grew 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. 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 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.
Academic Services

Our mission in Academic Services is to deliver an outstanding support service to the Open University’s students, wherever they are, and whatever their circumstances.

Academic Services plays a lead role in the students’ relationship with their OU, and we strive continuously to improve and enhance the student experience. In addition, Academic Services continually pushes the boundaries of service excellence, working in close collaboration with colleagues across the University, and in particular, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor – Students, OUSA (Open University Students Association), the Executive Deans of the four Faculties, and colleagues in Marketing, Communications, Learner and Discovery Services, and IT.

Size and scope

The Academic Services unit sits within the Professional Services Portfolio, under the leadership of the University Secretary. Professional Services encompasses the following functional areas:

- People Services
- Finance
- Estates
- Academic Services
- Learner and Discovery Services
- Internal Audit
- CIO Office and IT
- Communications and Marketing
- Governance and Compliance.

Approximately 900 staff are employed by Academic Services at or through the central units based at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, and other offices at Manchester and Nottingham. Some Academic Services staff are also based in the Nation Offices in Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

Academic Services is led by the Director, Academic Services. This large unit is currently divided into five functional Units headed up by the following Directors:

- Director of ACTS (Access, Careers and Teaching Support)
- Director of ACQ (Assessment, Credit and Qualifications)
- Director of SST (Student Support Services)
- Director of SRF (Student Recruitment and Fees)
- Director of OUVP (Open University Validation Partnerships)

There is also a small team supporting the Directorate in the Office of the Director, Academic Services. This team coordinates activities on behalf of the Director and manages the Unit-wide financial planning and resourcing as well as cross-unit communications.
The Role

Role: Director Academic Services
Reporting to: University Secretary
Location: Milton Keynes

Overview of the Role

The role of Director Academic Services is an exciting opportunity to lead one of the largest units in The Open University and be responsible for the next step change in delivering an outstanding student experience.

As the Director, you will provide a clear vision and direction that will promote continuous improvement, innovation and agility in service delivery, and ensure that the University is at the forefront of world-leading student support, working in consultation and close collaboration with the PVC – Students, Faculties and other units.

As Director of Academic Services, you will report to the University Secretary and be a member of both the Vice Chancellor’s Executive team (VCE), and the newly formed Vice Chancellor’s Executive – Academic team (VCE-Academic). This key position in the University provides a great opportunity to contribute to cross-institutional strategic direction, working very closely with other members of VCE and the Vice Chancellor to shape and influence the formation of policy, and ensure that all our operational student support activities align with, and actively support, the achievement of the University’s central objective of student success.

As Director you will be responsible for delivering effective student services on behalf of the University. The scope of activity is wide and includes supporting students throughout their journey, from initial enquirer to graduation – and every step in between. This diverse and interesting portfolio therefore encompasses:

- A wide range of information, advice and guidance services for students;
- The essential and important student registration and fee payment administration for our 175,000 individual learners;
- Relationships with funders and the Student Loan Company;
- Working with Faculties to ensure the organisation and oversight of tutor support to learners through our Associate Lecturer community;
- The organisation of venues for all learning activity;
- Quality assurance processes for the award of HE Credit and Qualifications;
- Validations for partner organisations; and
- The administration and the provision of Degree Ceremonies.

Effective delivery of such services relies on a suite of IT systems. The Director is the business owner of the systems that support its services and works very closely with IT to agree priorities for systems development and maintenance. Over the next two to three years the University is replacing all major operational IT systems, and the successful implementation of new cloud-based systems for student support will be a core priority for the Director of Academic Services.

The Open University’s work in all four nations of the UK requires that you work collaboratively with the Director OU in Ireland, Director OU in Wales and Director OU in Scotland, to develop service and delivery that is truly four Nations by design, and reflects the different policy and funding contexts of the different governments.

Collaboration and collegiate working is a key motif of the role. The Director leads collaboration with Faculties, sharing responsibility for the strategic direction, planning and development of:

- Providing Associate Lecturer support, careers and employability support for our students, support for students in secure environments and disabled students through the Access, Careers and Teaching Support teams.
- Enquirer and student contact (both reactive and proactive), ensuring the quality of service, the provision of online support, and the provision of fees and funding support through the Student Recruitment and Support Centre teams.
The award of HE Credit and Qualifications and the provision of Degree Ceremonies providing operational, administrative, processing and quality assurance processes through the Assessment, Credit and Qualification teams.

Validation of the programmes of institutions that do not have their own degree awarding powers, or alternatively that wish to offer OU awards through the Validation Partnerships team.

In addition, the Director of Academic Services has a direct responsibility for the University’s relationships with the OU Students Association and the Associate Lecturer Executive, ensuring mutual respect, understanding and collaboration.

**Duties**

To provide outstanding strategic leadership of Academic Services as the University responds to new opportunities and challenges within a rapidly changing environment, ensuring all services are delivered at the highest level of quality.

- Represent Academic Services in the University and HE sector.
- Ensure that strategies and resourcing for Academic Services are effectively coordinated within the overall strategic framework of the University.
- Ensure that student experience and student service issues are in the forefront at VCE, and senior University committees, and in external fora.
- Establish and maintain clear and measurable strategic plans, budgets and targets, and robust and fit-for-purpose operational procedures across Academic Services and deliver measurable service improvements and ensure that all elements of the service represent the best value for money.
- Provide Academic Services with high-quality and empowering leadership, line-managing the units that make up Academic Services to set and deliver the highest service standards, embedding a strong performance culture for both operational efficiency and student success by developing and sustaining sector best practice across the units.
- Build strong student engagement and develop relationships with the Open University Students Association (OU Students Association) the PVC -Students and Faculties that lead to the delivery of the University’s strategic objectives. Support the OU Students Association in representing student opinion and in developing relevant and responsive services.
- Work closely with the Nations to provide integrated support for students in the UK, Republic of Ireland and internationally.
- Work closely with IT to ensure the delivery and development of systems required by Academic Services to enable the recruitment, support, self-service and success of enquirers, students and Associate Lecturers.
- Work closely with Marketing to ensure appropriate support in handling engagement with potential students’ information, as well as advice and guidance needs to support student recruitment and retention.
- Ensure that Academic Services delivers services for students that are compliant with both University and HE sector policy.
- Embed a culture of continuous improvement and foster strong teamwork within Academic Services and with other University units.
- Have oversight of relationships and work closely with Faculties to ensure the provision of support for Associate Lecturers for their recruitment, professional development and service delivery.

Play a full part, as a member of VCE, VCE – Academic, the Senior Team and as an ex-officio member of the Senate and other University committees, in the overall leadership, management and governance of the University, and promote agreed strategies, policies and objectives to internal and external communities. Develop and implement policy and manage initiatives in particular areas as requested by the University Secretary.
Strategic Direction

- Provide the vision and leadership of Academic Services that ensures the University’s position as a leading provider of Student Support and Academic Services.
- Build strategic relationships within the University and externally, to develop and implement effective strategies to continually improve services to students.
- 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 the enhancement of digital capability to maximise the student experience, providing a seamless student journey from enquirer through to learning and graduation.

Leadership and people management

- Provide Academic 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 Academic Services contributes to successful outcomes for Students and the University.
- Direct, inspire, motivate, engage and challenge leaders and managers in Academic Services to deliver flexible, responsive and relevant user-focused services to agreed performance and quality standards, deadlines and budgets.
- Ensure that Academic 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.

Planning, management and delivery

- Deliver market leading services that are core to an excellent student experience and promote and encourage student retention.
- Ensure that the culture, policies, structures and reporting systems are in place to allow the Unit to achieve the highest standards of quality, legal and regulatory compliance and corporate governance in all areas.
- Work closely with IT to ensure the delivery and development of systems required to support front line services with students.
- Ensure that the Unit’s resources and budget are managed effectively, in accordance with institutional policy and procedures, and provide best value for money.
- 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.
- Play an effective role as member of VCE and VCE - Academic in the leadership of the University.
- Maintain effective relationships with the PVC – Students, Faculties and other Professional Services units to ensure a partnership approach and high-quality service to students.
- Build strong student engagement and develop relationships with the OU Students Association that lead to delivery of the University's strategic objectives.
- Actively engage students in their support and well-being, ensuring that their voice is listened to and acted upon.

External:

- Keep abreast of national and international initiatives in higher education, sharing connections and knowledge within Academic 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 Academic Services is able to compete, anticipate and meet new challenge.
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

- Demonstrable leadership, strategic management and operational experience gained at a senior level in an area of high direct relevance to the Academic Services remit, gained within higher education, 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 across a complex portfolio of responsibilities.
- Strong interpersonal skills, with the ability to engage at all levels across a range of internal and external stakeholders and partners.
- 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.
- A strong track record of successfully developing and delivering a first-class, customer-centric customer service.
- A successful record of senior management at a relevant scale and breadth, in a customer-facing organisation.
- The ability to demonstrate a clear understanding of relevant issues in higher education and how they relate to the student experience, along with the demonstrable ability to acquire the knowledge and understanding necessary to lead this professional service in the University.
- The ability to manage in an environment with multiple stakeholders.

Part Two – Personal Attributes

- A commitment to the mission, values and ethos of the University, 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.
- Demonstrable creativity and a commitment to future-proofing service and delivery in an ever-changing environment.
- The ability both to lead culture change and to drive results-oriented operations.
- The ability to develop and communicate a strong and compelling vision for Academic Services, setting the corresponding operational plans that will offer first-class services to students.
- The ability to work within a regulatory framework and to articulate its potential as a tool for continuous improvement.
- Commitment to the highest standards of professional service delivery combined with an ability to anticipate and address evolving, enquirer, student and customer needs in the changing HE landscape.
- An inspiring and empowering leadership style and approach, required to develop and motivate professional teams, including the OU’s Associate Lecturers, in order to foster a culture of accountability and excellence at all levels of Academic Services.
- Ability to quickly establish credibility with staff from all Academic and Professional Services Units.
- Substantial strength and experience in senior management, including the use of relevant management information to monitor and drive performance.
- The ability to identify opportunities for innovation and development and to deliver performance that delivers best value for money.
- The ability to articulate evidence-based strategy in an empowering, collegiate and inspiring way which also informs transparent, viable and sustainable planning processes.

- Outstanding communication and influencing skills; the gravitas and experience to represent the University to the relevant communities within the institution, and to relevant national and international bodies and organisations.
How to Apply

Key dates

The Open University has engaged the services of Anderson Quigley to whom applications should be sent at your earliest convenience and in any event by no later than **noon on Monday 27th May 2019**.

The final interview process with The Open University is anticipated to take place in Milton Keynes on **17th July**. You are kindly requested to diarise the dates.

How to apply

To apply, please submit a comprehensive curriculum vitae along with a covering letter, setting out your interest in the role and details of how you match the required criteria. Please include in a separate document the names and addresses of three referees. Referees will not be approached until the final stages and not without prior permission from candidates.

The preferred method of application is online at [http://www.andersonquigley.com/candidates](http://www.andersonquigley.com/candidates). Using the reference **AQ469**. All applications will receive an automated response.

All candidates are also requested to complete an online Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form which will be found at the end of the application process. This will assist The Open University in monitoring selection decisions to assess whether equality of opportunity is being achieved. Information collated from the Equal Opportunities Monitoring forms will not be used as part of the selection process and will be treated as strictly confidential.

Personal data

In line with GDPR, we ask that you do NOT send us any information that can identify children or any of your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, data concerning health or sex life and sexual orientation, genetic and/or biometric data) in your CV and application documentation. Following this notice, any inclusion of your Sensitive Personal Data in your CV/application documentation will be understood by us as your express consent to process this information. Please also remember to not mention anyone’s information or details (e.g. referees) who have not previously agreed to their inclusion.

Provisional recruitment timetable

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<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closing date</td>
<td>noon on Monday 27th May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQ Interviews</td>
<td>w/c 10th and 17th June</td>
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<tr>
<td>OU interviews</td>
<td>17th July</td>
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We are committed to ensuring everyone can access our website and application processes. This includes people with sight loss, hearing, mobility and cognitive impairments. Should you require access to these documents in alternative formats, please contact: virginia@andersonquigley.com

Queries

For a confidential conversation about the opportunity, please contact:

Ed Pritchard on +44 (0)203 457 0948.