THE COUNCIL

Council Member

DUTIES AND EXPECTATIONS OF ROLE

1 Formal Role

a) The Council

All persons appointed to the Council are expected to respect and uphold the University’s mission, as set out in its Charter, and to be committed to its core values and objects.

The main responsibilities of the Council, and thereby the primary duties of a member, are set out in its Statement of Role and Primary Responsibilities. They may be summarised as follow:

- Proper Conduct of Public Business
- Ensuring that the Mission of the University is fulfilled
- Strategic Planning
- Monitoring Effectiveness and Performance
- Finance
- Audit and Risk
- Estate Management
- Human Resource Management
- Equality and Diversity
- Health and Safety
- Student’s Union

Members should assure the University’s corporate responsibilities and obligations under law, regulation, and public and University policy as appropriate, with reference to national expectations and guidance on qualifications frameworks, and the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education. This includes having a knowledge of the OU governance framework, including the Charter and Statutes, standing orders and schedules of delegation, codes of governance, and the relevant law, regulation, and policies and procedures.

The Open University is an exempt charity as well as a legally independent corporate institution. Members of the Council are therefore trustees of a charitable body, and have the responsibilities and potential liabilities that go with trustee status. In particular, members are required to discharge their duties of compliance, prudence (including to ensure financial solvency) and care, and to accept ultimate responsibility for the affairs of the charity. Council members have a particular responsibility to be cognisant of the Charities Act and their role as a trustee.

The Council and its committees exercise their responsibilities in a corporate manner; that is to say, decisions are taken collectively by all of the members acting as a body. Members should not act individually, or as representatives of a constituency or in informal groups, to take decisions on governing body business on an ad hoc basis outside the constitutional framework of the meetings of the Council and its committees.
Upon commencing appointment, members of the Council are required to declare any pecuniary, family or other personal interest, direct or indirect, and this is noted in the Register of Members’ Interests.

Members are expected to adhere to the University’s Code of Conduct, which sets out the standards and expectations around the roles, responsibilities, behaviours and attitudes that support the core governance of the OU and enable it to function effectively. This requires members to demonstrate high ethical and professional standards acting in good faith, honestly and properly, exercising appropriate care and diligence in accordance with the accepted Seven Principles of Public Life, (Nolan Principles) drawn up by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which embrace selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership, and the additional principles of public service and respect identified in the Nine Principles of Public Life in Scotland.

b) Council Committees

All Council members should be available to sit on Council committees if required. External members are normally expected to become a member of at least one of the Council’s committees, as part of their role. The Council will endeavour to appoint a member to a Committee where their skills and experience can make the most positive contribution. Members may also have an opportunity to contribute specific expertise by serving on working groups established by the Council for specific purposes.

2 Other Activities

Members are expected to engage with the University, not only through meetings and committees, but also by taking advantage of other opportunities to foster understanding of the University’s business, functions and departments.

External co-opted members of the Council and Council committees should attend at least one award ceremony each year and are strongly encouraged to attend other University functions, such as open days, lectures, etc.

Members are also expected to promote the interests of the University. They can work on behalf of the University in many ways, including:

- As ambassadors outside the University, especially in commercial, business and political/national spheres, using their personal influence and networking skills as appropriate.
- Within the University by communicating with different groups of staff and students, explaining the work of the Council and gathering opinions.
- On behalf of the University on formal occasions and in other national University and HE fora.

TERM AND TIME COMMITMENT

The initial appointment of a Council member is for four years. Members are eligible for re-appointment for a second term and the maximum period of office is eight years. Student members are appointed by the OU Students Association for a term of two years; and are eligible to serve a second term.

The Council normally meets at least 4 times per year, in March, May, July and November, but will call additional meetings if business dictates. Meetings are held in
Milton Keynes and in one of each of the four UK nations and one English region annually. Formal business is combined with strategic or development events, so meetings usually take place over a whole day. In addition, the Council has a joint meeting with the Senate in April and an annual Development Day in September.

Most Council Committees meet 3-4 times per year.

Time is also needed to keep up with the Council and other committee papers, and with other significant University documents.

QUALITIES REQUIRED

Members should demonstrate the following qualities, skills and experience:

a) enthusiasm for and commitment to the mission of the Open University, and its values, aims and objectives, particularly diversity and widening participation;

b) passion for the higher education sector in the UK and appreciation of the national and international issues of relevance to the operation of the OU;

c) broad experience, a high profile within his/her area of expertise and the ability to command respect;

d) a strategic mind-set, good analytical and communication skills and the ability to identify key issues;

e) good interpersonal/communication skills at all levels;

f) ability to act fairly and impartially in the interests of the University as a whole, using independent judgement and maintaining confidentiality as appropriate;

g) ability to establish a good working relationship with the Chair, and work with him/her in to provide appropriate support and challenge to the executive, whilst respecting the boundaries of a non-executive's remit;

h) well-developed stakeholder management abilities;

i) access to a network of contacts;

j) not overtly party political; and

k) the ability to make a meaningful contribution to one or more Committees of Council.

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

The University aims to have a diverse skill set amongst the membership of the OU Council, so the specific skills and experience of potential candidates will vary according to the current membership.