CANDIDATE BRIEF FOR THE POSITION PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR (STUDENTS)

The Open University Autumn 2022
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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 157 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 to make high quality, flexible education open for all. 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. Since our foundation, more than 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. Over 205,000 students are currently studying with us, and these include:

- Over 30,000 students declare a disability.
- 1,400 people from 150 UK prisons and secure units
- Students sponsored by FTSE 100 companies and major public services like the police and the NHS.
- In excess of 2,700 students on apprenticeship courses partnering with over 750 employers with 46 apprenticeships across Scotland.
- FutureLearn Limited, which reaches over 10 million, our jointly owned MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) platform.

Some other highlights include:

- We rank as one of the top universities in respect of the overall satisfaction of our students as measured in the 2021 National Students Survey.
- A unique partnership with the BBC since 1971 and co-production of approximately 35 prime-time TV and radio series every year: including flagship co-productions such as Frozen Planet and Blue Planet II, which transformed attitudes about the health of our oceans, and Blue Planet Live winning the 2020 BAFTA for ‘Best Live Event. During 2018/19, OU-BBC TV and radio programmes reached a large audience and were viewed or listened to 264 million times.
- The OU’s free-learning platform, OpenLearn, which provides free courses and has had over 67 million course visits from learners to date.
- Being one of the top three Space Science Research Centres in the UK; pioneering an inclusive innovation approach to international development research; and having worldwide influence on innovations in learning technologies to deliver digital education at scale.
- Providing free educational resources to teachers and healthcare workers in sub-Saharan Africa and India, reaching over two million people.
• Our world-leading Business School, which is part of the top 1% of the global business schools that are triple accredited by the world’s leading management education association.

We play a unique role in society, making higher education open to all and promoting social justice and social mobility. We are innovative, leading the learning revolution, placing innovation at the heart of teaching and research, continuously seeking new and better ways to inspire and enable learning, and conducting world-class research and teaching. 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 Milton Keynes. It also has national headquarters in Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast and Dublin, and bases in Manchester and Nottingham.

Teaching and learning
As well as hundreds of accredited higher education courses, from access modules to doctorates, we provide free courses on our OpenLearn platform, many linked to our partnership with the BBC, and are co-owners of FutureLearn, a global marketplace for short courses and degrees. With over 9500 employees, we are a large employer in a wide range of professional areas. About half of our employees are associate lecturers, who provide the small group tuition that is a key feature of the OU’s teaching and learning model. Others include academics, researchers, student advisors, specialist administrators, IT specialists, designers, editors and a wide range of support services from marketing and communications to finance, estates and governance.

Leadership and governance
The University 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 University’s Chancellor is Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho and its Pro-Chancellor (who also chairs the Council) is Malcolm Sweeting.

The Vice-Chancellor is accountable to the Council for maintaining and promoting the efficiency and good order of the University.

MORE INFORMATION
More information on the OU’s leadership and existing structure can be found at www.open.ac.uk/about/main/governance-ou/executive-team
The OU delivers world-class, flexible education to people across the four nations of the UK, Ireland and worldwide.

We are the largest provider of part-time education in England, with over 122,000 students choosing to study with the OU. Highly rated for student satisfaction, in the National Student Survey 2021, the OU was ranked third overall in the UK for student satisfaction, first in Northern Ireland and Wales, and second in Scotland and England. The OU makes a major contribution to addressing widening participation in England. Nearly 30% of our new English undergraduate students do not have traditional entry requirements, around 20% are from low participation neighbourhoods and 1 in 5 has a disability. Collectively over 50% of OU students in England come from disadvantaged backgrounds. 76% are in employment while they study.

We have over 22,000 students in Scotland and we exceed sectoral targets for the recruitment of entrants from the most socially deprived areas. Through our successful partnership with colleges, over 18% of our new undergraduates have a college Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma.

Over 14,500 students across Wales are currently studying with The Open University. Student numbers in Wales have increased significantly over the last three years following the introduction of new financial support arrangements, presenting us with new growth opportunities in this part of the UK. 45% of OU students in Wales come from the most disadvantaged areas and around seven out of ten students are in employment while they study.

The Open University is the only university in Northern Ireland dedicated to distance learning and has over 7000 students. We have been the top-rated university in Northern Ireland for overall student satisfaction in the National Student Survey for 16 consecutive years. We also operate across the Republic of Ireland with over 900 students choosing to study with us.

The OU continues to make a significant impact internationally and has a history of building successful, long-term partnerships. We currently have over 30 partners in 27 countries worldwide, supporting and teaching over 300,000 students using OU content and methodologies.

The Open University has been committed to International Development for over twenty years. Our current projects empower teachers, healthcare workers and higher education experts and have reached over 2 million people around the world.
MISSION AND STRATEGY

The Open University’s mission is to be open to people, places, methods and ideas.

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.
Strategy

Through the power of learning we aim to transform lives and communities, opening a world of possibilities for everyone.

Our Strategy: Learn and Live (2022-2027) is built on five goals and seven enablers, showing how we will achieve our mission over the next five years.

Our five goals:

• **greater reach**, offering unrivalled choice, quality and flexibility to more people from all parts of society through a range of channels and learning opportunities, with the University’s core offer of qualifications and accredited learning at its centre.

• **success for our students**, supporting them to achieve their goals, whoever and wherever they are, with outcomes that are equitable and open up new opportunities in life and work.

• **societal impact** locally and globally through research, enterprise and skills development that shape the future.

• **equity**, greater diversity at all levels, and inclusion in every aspect of how we work and what we achieve.

• **environmental and social sustainability**.

The seven enablers to reach our goals:

• **living our values**, being inclusive, innovative and responsive in all we do.

• **supporting each other** to do our best work.

• **continuously improving** how we work and manage change.

• **employing secure and effective technologies** with the best possible user experience.

• **using data and evidence** in all our decision-making.

• **building on our uniqueness** as a university for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

• **stewarding our finances** so that we can invest in our goals.

MORE INFORMATION

More information on the OU’s Mission and Strategy can be found at [https://www.open.ac.uk/about/main/strategy](https://www.open.ac.uk/about/main/strategy)

1 Channels are the platforms through which the University reaches learners, such as its virtual learning environment, our OpenLearn website, collaborations with employers and colleges, and broadcasting with the BBC. Learning opportunities are its various course products, from degrees and modules to apprenticeships and microcredentials, as well as different ways in which these can be studied, from higher and lower study intensity to blended or entirely online experiences.
FINANCES AND KEY STATISTICS

In 2020/2021 the OU had 205,420 students (87,960 full time equivalent). Total income was £561m, of which £393m from tuition fees and education contracts, £104m from funding body grants, and £13m 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.

Key Statistics

The Open University has spent over 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 continue to increase the numbers of students directly studying with us and these students are studying at a higher intensity as shown by the increase in full-time equivalent students.

Our students have voted us third overall in the National Student Survey Awards. We retained an overall satisfaction rate at 88% across the UK, with an increase to 92% in Scotland. We ranked first in Wales and in Northern Ireland we were again first retaining this ranking for 17 years. In England and Scotland, we were ranked second.

Our excellent research informs our cutting-edge curriculum and is recognised by numerous external funding grants.

Securing external investment for FutureLearn

In 2019, we secured the largest EDTech investment in Europe from SEEK, making us joint owners of the platform that sees over 10 million learners globally. This will enable us to grow our educational offering to students and industry across the world.

Extending our reach

We remain the largest university in the UK and one of the largest universities in Europe in terms of student numbers, the majority of whom are part-time and study at a distance.

Our work in Apprenticeships continue to grow. The DfE statistics have confirmed once again that we are the largest provider of degree apprenticeships in England based on 2019/20 statistics.

We introduced free Badged Open Courses for learners who want to develop their study skills whilst wanting recognition, with more than 208,000 enrolments by July 2019.

Enhancing our multiple media channels

Our enduring relationship with the BBC continues to provide high calibre programming demonstrated by Blue Planet Live winning the 2020 BAFTA for ‘Best Live Event’.

We won Public/Private Partnership of the year at the 2020 PIEoneer awards in recognition of our successful partnership with Uber.

The paper co-authored by STEM PhD student, Madhu Madhavi, called ‘Coal in the twenty-first century: a climate of change and uncertainty’ was formally awarded the James Watt Medal by Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) Publishing.

The Language of Lying, commissioned by our OpenLearn team and produced by Hamlett Films, won the MEDEA Award 2020.

In Ireland we received an ‘Excellence in Online Learning’ Award from Public Sector Magazine in Ireland.

Two Guardian University Awards, for the Uber partnership widening access and outreach, and nQuire for research impact. Both initiatives reflect the remarkable ability that our channels and platforms have to reach people who want to learn and discover new knowledge.

Use of our multiple media channels continues to grow. Total downloads from The Open University iTunes U service reached 73.4 million, video views of Open University content on YouTube reached 53 million, total Amazon Kindle downloads for Open University books since 2013 reached 1.7 million and visits to the University’s open educational resource website, OpenLearn, reached 80.8 million.
ABOUT THE ROLE

The Open University was established by Royal Charter in 1969 with the mission is to be ‘open to people, places, methods and ideas’. It is a national university, working in all four nations of the UK as well as globally, employing around 11,000 people across a range of academic, associate lecturer and professional services roles. Pioneering higher education by distance learning over 2 million people have studied with the OU, predominantly part-time and often while in paid work.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) has executive responsibility for the University’s policies and processes supporting student access, continuation, completion and employment outcomes. The appointment is made by a joint committee of the University Senate and Council.

Reporting directly to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, along with the four Faculty Executive Deans and three Nation Directors for Scotland, Wales and Ireland, the role holder is a member of the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive and may, in addition to the responsibilities listed, be asked to undertake other functions and duties as delegated by the Vice-Chancellor.

The appointment is initially for five years with eligibility for re-appointment. A permanent academic appointment in an appropriate Faculty may be made if the successful applicant is an external candidate. The role holder is seconded full-time from their academic appointment to the PVC role.

The PVC (Students) will work closely with the Director of Academic Services to ensure that policy development and operational implementation are tightly integrated.
Key Statistics
This is a critical leadership role reporting directly to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and sitting on both the Vice Chancellor’s Executive and the VCE-Academic teams. Working very closely with the faculty Executive Deans and our nations Directors you will deliver success through collaboration and influencing, achieving this through direct and indirect authority. You will act internally as the ultimate student voice and representative, and externally as the face of The Open University for student matters with regulators and other Higher Education sector organisations.

The role holder will need to:

• Leads at institution-level the quality assurance and enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment across The Open University, including accountability to governance, policy, funding and regulatory bodies.

• Leads the University’s strategic objectives, plans and programmes as relevant to the role, currently including the Access, Participation and Success Strategy, the access programme and the University’s cross-disciplinary open programme.

• Leads strategic submissions, exercises and projects, currently including the Teaching Excellence Framework and National Student Survey.

• Leads the University’s engagement with The Open University Students Association, including budgetary and governance oversight.

• Leads on student voice and wellbeing, including currently safeguarding and carers.

• Leads on all the above matters regarding Senate and Senate Committee governance and Council and Council Committee governance.

• Supports the Deputy Vice-Chancellor’s leadership of the Teaching and Learning Plan.

• Works collaboratively with the Nation Directors, Executive Deans, Director of Academic Services, and Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, who have specific leadership responsibilities in the above areas.

• Promotes the University’s reputation externally.

• Presides, as required by the Vice-Chancellor, at graduation ceremonies across the UK.
PERSON SPECIFICATION

Skills and experience

Success in this role requires:

• Logical and evidence-based thinking that achieves positive change and improvement.
• Collaborative team player building highly effective working relationships with a range of stakeholders. Internally, negotiating and influencing resourcing decisions for the delivery of an excellent student experience, including student-related projects, in the context of wider OU priorities. Externally, building networks that create an understanding of the wider landscape of HE, and innovations and governments’ policy changes that impact the OU.
• Experience and understanding of large-scale student systems to allow effective sponsorship and support of operational leads for each workstream.
• Outstanding communication, including both internal and external presentations and written reports, including engagement with regulators and communication across the four UK Nations.
• Commitment to the OU’s mission and values, including equality, diversity and inclusion and sustainability.

Previous experience

• Extensive senior academic experience and achievement in teaching and learning, including in digital environments and working with governance. This should include operating at a senior leadership level, chairing and sponsoring enterprise-wide initiatives.
• Sustained record of strategic leadership in a large and complex education institution, including managing change to achieve positive outcomes with a strong focus on student voice and wellbeing.