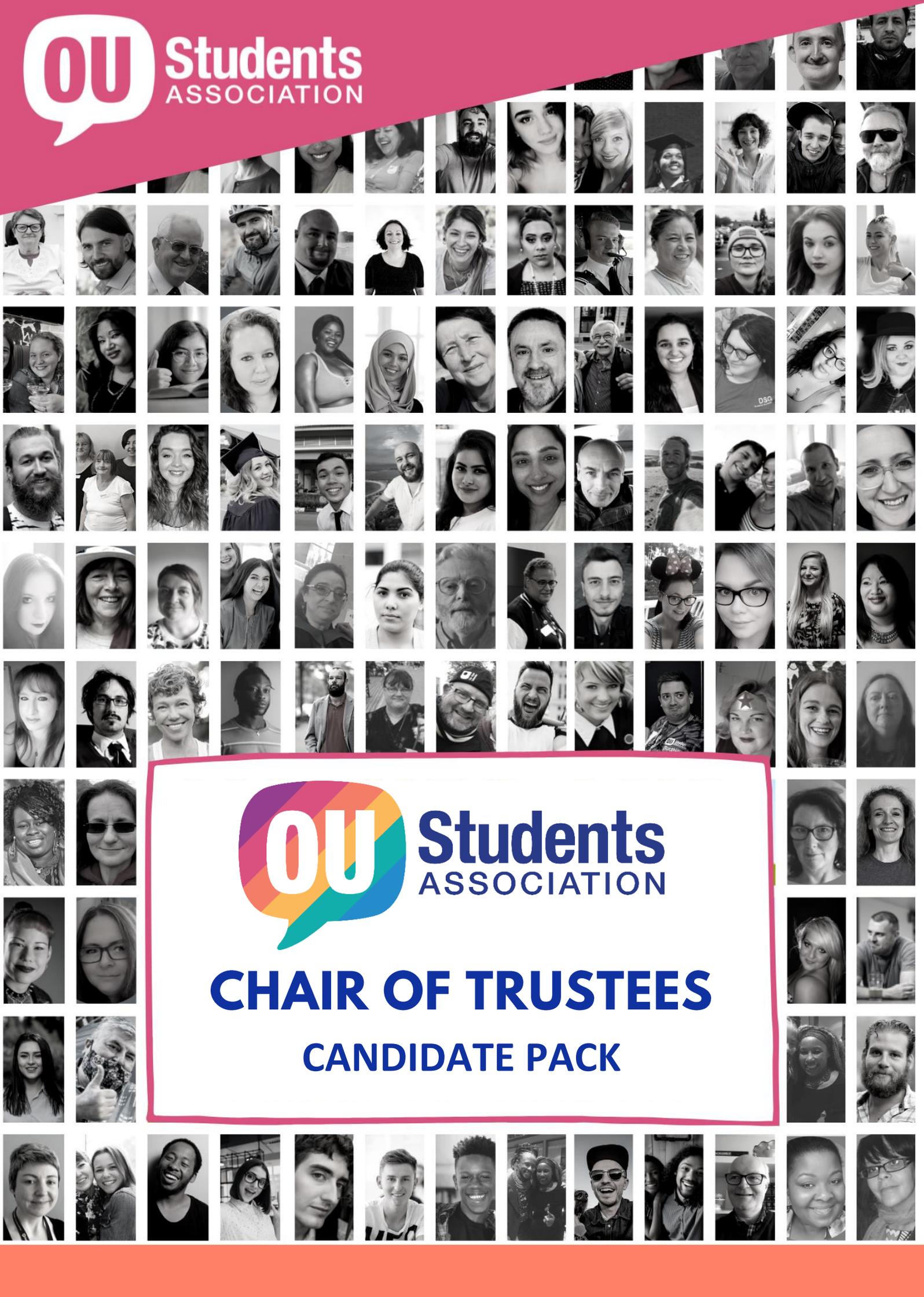




**Students**  
ASSOCIATION



**Students**  
ASSOCIATION

**CHAIR OF TRUSTEES**

**CANDIDATE PACK**

## Chair of Trustees, Open University Students Association

**Location:** Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

**Nature of the role:** This is an unremunerated voluntary role but reasonable expenses incurred will be covered.

**Skills:** We are seeking an experienced Chair to support our trustee board. We are particularly interested in candidates with a background in HR or digital communications/marketing to support the skills gaps on our current board, however, we would still consider applications from experienced Chairs with other relevant skills.

**Closing date:** ongoing – applicants will be reviewed as they come in. Interviews to be held in August.

### Background to the organisation

The Open University Students Association is a company limited by guarantee (number 12031028) and a registered charity (number 1183837 and SC049546). We are a Students Union within the definition of the Education Act 1994. Our mission is to make a positive difference for all Open University students. Our student body is unlike any other, as shown by the following facts:

- Over 170,000 total students, the largest University in the UK and one of the largest in Europe.
- Majority of students are studying part-time and at distance across the 4 Nations of the UK and in continental Europe. There are OU students in 90% of UK postal districts.
- Over 24,000 disabled students
- 3 in 4 OU students are in work
- Over 1,700 students are currently studying in prison and other secure environments
- For most courses, no previous qualifications are required to study, removing some of the barriers to higher education.

Our charitable objects are the advancement of education of students of the Open University for the public benefit by:

- Defending the principles of equal opportunity and of open access to the University regardless of academic qualifications or financial circumstances.
- Promoting the interests and welfare of students at the Open University during their period of study and representing and supporting students.
- Being the recognised representative channel between students and the Open University and any other external bodies.
- Asserting that all students studying with the Open University have the right to have their views heard and acknowledged by the University.
- Providing social, cultural and recreational activities and forums for discussions and debate for the personal development of its students.

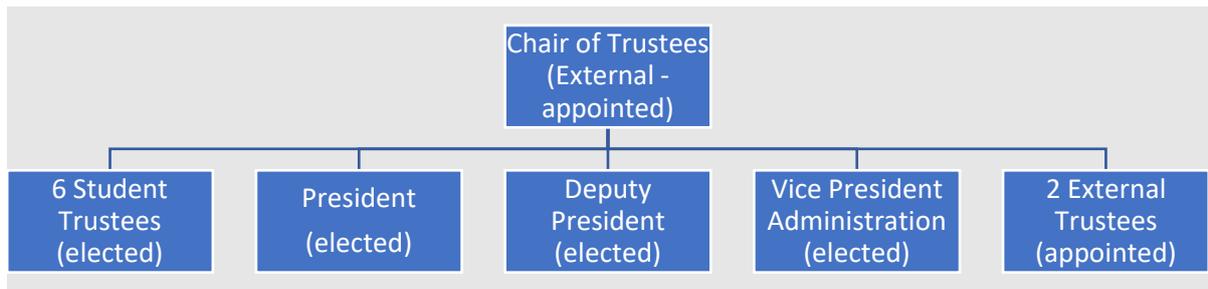
We operate through a democratic governance structure, which includes students elected by their fellow students in our key leadership roles. This includes our President and the Central

Executive Committee of student representatives who shape the policy and activities of the Students Association. The Central Executive Committee members are the public face of the organisation, representing student interests.



The Board of Trustees acts to safeguard the Students Association, leading on the management and administration of its strategy, governance, finances and staffing.

The Board of Trustees includes places for the President, two other elected student Officers (our Deputy President and Vice President Administration), six directly-elected Student Trustees and three External Trustees making a total of 12. All student positions are elected, and the current members are due to complete their terms on 31 July 2022 with a new elected board taking office 1 August 2022.



External Trustees are not elected, they are appointed in their roles following recommendation by the current Board of Trustees and approval by the Central Executive Committee. External Trustees provide the continuity through from the current group into the next. We currently have one External Trustee supporting us as Acting Chair of Trustees.

The Trustees and student representatives are supported by a team of 40+ professional staff led by our Chief Executive. Our staff are based in Milton Keynes but they are currently piloting hybrid working, with a view to making a decision with the Trustees about how this looks in the future.

You can read more about the Association, our governance, our accounts and minutes of meetings on our website at [oustudents.com](https://oustudents.com).

## Role available

Following the departure of our Chair, after completion of their term, we are seeking an experienced Chair to lead our board.

Following a skills audit, the Board is keen to find candidates with either Human Resources experience (especially in the areas of EDI and culture) or with digital communications/marketing experience.

We are a student's association (union) whose role is to represent our diverse student body. We recognise that this means we need to ensure that the voices around our table better reflect and understand the whole community we exist to serve. We therefore encourage individuals who identify as Black, Asian or other Ethnic Minority groups to apply. We are keen to support applications from these underrepresented groups, so please reach out for a conversation if you are unsure about the role.

At the rear of this pack is a detailed role description and person specification for the role of Chair of Trustees.

## Finances

We have an annual expenditure of around £2million. Our major source of funding is a block grant from the Open University, known as the subvention, which is negotiated on an annual basis. Our audited accounts can be viewed on our website and on the Charity Commission's website.

## Strategy

Trustees oversee our approved strategy to take us through to 2022/23. This ambitious strategy focuses on three core strategic objectives for the period which are to:

- Inform and Support: we want to increase awareness of the Students Association and improve the relevance of our services.
- Engage and Involve: we want to increase student engagement and improve opportunities.
- Influence and Transform: we want to increase our influence and improve our impact.

This is an exciting time for new Trustees to join us as we are approaching the end of our current strategy, and any new members of the board will join us in developing a new strategy to achieve our objectives and enhance our mission for OU Students.

Our organisational values are Integrity; Equality and Inclusivity; Kindness and Compassion; Openness; and Collaboration. More details of our strategy can be viewed on our website.

## Term length

We seek to make an appointment until 31 July 2024 as our term limit is two years, with potential future extension on two-year terms by agreement between both parties. All Trustees may serve up to a maximum of eight years in line with our Articles of Association.

## Time commitment

The last meeting for the current board is 19 July 2022, further dates for the 2022-24 year will be set by the full Board of Trustees at this meeting.

All meetings are usually held during business hours, meetings are held either online or at the Open University's campus in Milton Keynes although this is agreed by the full Board to suit their needs and remote attendance is also supported. The Trustees will occasionally arrange meetings outside of their regular cycle and outside business hours to suit the group should a need arise, e.g. a conference call in the evening or the OU annual dinner on a weekend.

In addition to attending the regular scheduled meetings, the Chair will also be expected to participate in a few other ways:

- Attending an induction session with our Chief Executive, which will be arranged at a mutually convenient time.
- Providing 1:1 support for the Chief Executive and President at regular intervals.
- Besides the meeting dates, we would anticipate that the time commitment for this role averages out throughout the year to around 4-5 hours a week. This will include participating in discussions on the Trustees' online forums should a need arise, posting decisions on any urgent requests, reading papers and preparing for meetings. We also make good use of our online discussion spaces and emails.

- External Trustees may be asked for additional insight and advice from their own professional expertise to support our development.

Trustees are invited to take part in the following optional activities if they wish to do so:

- Visiting our offices to meet our staff group and hear more about their work.
- An optional invitation to attend at least a part of our biennial Conference, which takes place over the summer on Milton Keynes campus.
- Training and development sessions, including webinars and external events hosted by our legal advisors and auditors.
- Occasional optional events, including attendance at joint events with the University and attending our annual dinner.

## Eligibility

Applicants must not be disqualified from serving as a Charity Trustee as per the [Charity Commission rules](#). Trustees will be asked to sign a declaration that they comply with the Charity Commission requirements. External Trustees must not be a student of the Open University, hold any elected or paid position within the Students Association or the Open University, nor be a member of the Open University's governing Council. Open University alumni are however welcome to apply.

## Support for the role

All Trustees are advised and supported by the Chief Executive and other relevant senior staff members as well as by the rest of the Board of Trustees who are a very engaged and committed group who are keen to see the organisation go from strength to strength. We also have existing relationships with effective external advisors and specialists including HR consultants, legal advisors and auditors. We are also members of the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and Charity Finance Group (CFG) and make use of their training, guidance and induction materials. Trustees are provided with access to their online materials, which also includes a range of guidance and free training.

We also invest in the development of our Trustees and their own learning and expertise in charity governance by running regular training sessions, inviting external presentations and providing high quality external training opportunities and access to sector conferences. We are also proud holders of the Investing in Volunteers quality standard, which demonstrates our commitment to creating and supporting quality volunteering opportunities.

## Why apply for this role?

This is a fantastic opportunity to bring your skills and experience to help the growth, decision making and effective governance of a growing charity working at the forefront of supporting part-time and distance-learning students. Working as part of an engaged Board of Trustees, the successful candidate will have real scope to get involved in helping to shape our work and our development.

Our Board meetings are not just about effective governance, they also provide opportunities to get involved in detailed and interesting conversations on solving problems and inputting new ideas and initiatives to take us forward. In return for your time, commitment and input across our range of activities you will gain access to ongoing training and support and networking opportunities as well as the chance to develop your skills and experience in our context. You will be making a huge contribution to the organisation which will be valued and appreciated by your fellow Trustees and senior staff.

We welcome applications from all sections of the community, and work hard to meet all accessibility requirements Board members disclose to us and take a flexible and supportive approach for all members.

### **Deadline and how to apply:**

Please submit a CV and a covering letter of no more than two A4 sides to [OUstudents-Jobs@open.ac.uk](mailto:OUstudents-Jobs@open.ac.uk) which sets out:

- How you meet the experience, knowledge and skills aspects of our person specification.
- Why you want to be the Chair of Trustees for the OU Students Association.
- What you would like to gain from the opportunity.

**For an informal discussion about this opportunity:** Please email [OUstudents-Jobs@open.ac.uk](mailto:OUstudents-Jobs@open.ac.uk) to ask a question about this opportunity or to arrange an informal discussion.

Receipt will be acknowledged.

### **Next steps**

We will consider all applications and invite short-listed applicants to attend an interview with several of the existing Trustees and our Chief Executive. We would normally welcome the chosen candidate to attend our next Board meeting as an observer to meet the group and confirm their interest before we take the appointment further. If both parties are happy to proceed, the Board's recommendations of an appointee will go before the Central Executive Committee for approval.

# Chair of the Board of Trustees Role Description

**Direct reports:** Chief Executive, President and Deputy President, plus oversight of the Board of Trustees

## Role summary

Provides leadership and direction to the Board of Trustees by facilitating meetings and decision making, enabling the Board to fulfill their responsibilities for the overall governance and strategic direction of the organisation. Ensures that the Board of Trustees acts within its powers. Brings impartiality and objectivity to decision making.

Ensures that the organisation pursues its charitable objects, remains compliant with its own governing document and all relevant legislation and regulations, remains financially sustainable and delivers against its mission and strategy.

Works in partnership with the elected student President to ensure that the organisation remains student-led and seeks to add value and professionalism to the delivery of the organisation's mission. Seeks to ensure a healthy and productive relationship with the elected student representatives and Central Executive Committee.

Works in partnership with the Chief Executive to support the staff team, demonstrating leadership to create and maintain an effective and supportive working culture and achieve the aims of the organisation. Seeks to ensure a productive working relationship between the Board of Trustees and the staff; and between the staff and the elected student representatives.

## Main responsibilities of the Chair

### In relation to the Board:

- Ensures the production and delivery of the organisation's strategy and regular review of the long-term strategic aims of the charity.
- Seeks to build a team spirit amongst Trustees, inviting contributions and ensuring equity of voice across the Board.
- Ensures an annual cycle of board meetings, sets meeting agendas in conjunction with the President and Chief Executive, chairs and facilitates meetings, monitors decisions taken at meetings and ensures that they are implemented.
- Maintains a clear grasp of the charity's financial position and ensures full and timely financial transparency and information disclosure to the Board.
- Leads and mentors other Board members to fulfil their responsibilities where relevant and necessary. Enables access to training/coaching/information to enhance the overall contribution of the board. Developing the Board of Trustees including ensuring and actively engaging in recruitment, induction, training, appraisal and succession planning where necessary.

- Contributes to a regular review of the effectiveness of the Board, is self-reflective on own performance and actively invites constructive feedback to improve.
- Holds other Trustees to account where attendance, contribution or conduct falls short of Board expectations. Facilitates change and addresses conflict within the Board of Trustees or wider organisation where required, in collaboration with the President and Chief Executive.
- Ensures that the Board of Trustees makes effective use of the charity's sub-committees, advisors, consultants and partner organisations.
- Acts as first point of contact for other Trustees, the President or Chief Executive to discuss any concerns regarding the Board's role.
- Acts as the guardian of the legal and financial integrity of the organisation. Acts as final stage adjudicator for disciplinary and grievance procedures if required and so enabled.
- Ensures good communication to and from the Central Executive Committee and recognises the role of the Central Executive Committee to represent the voice of students and its primacy in policy making.
- Maintains an overview on sector good practice, including the Charity Governance Code. Attends relevant events where necessary and appropriate.

#### **In relation to the Chief Executive:**

- Supports the President and Board to appoint the Chief Executive.
- Supports and recognises the role of the Remuneration Committee in relation to deliberations on the pay policy for senior staff.
- Works in partnership with the President to lead the annual appraisal of the Chief Executive. Ensures a fair, professional, timely process which takes on board wider feedback. Supports the ongoing development of the Chief Executive.
- Seeks to foster and maintain a constructive, supportive and enabling relationship with the Chief Executive. Acts as first point of contact for management support.
- Acts as the supervisor of the Chief Executive on behalf of the Board, setting and maintaining a regular pattern of 1-2-1 meetings to ensure a constant dialogue.

#### **In relation to the President and Deputy President**

- Recognises and supports the President's role as the elected leader, spokesperson and public face of the organisation.
- Recognises the President's authority in discussions relating to the student experience and their primacy in the relationship with the Open University and all external partners.
- Ensures capable support to the President and elected student leadership team.
- Works in partnership with the Chief Executive, Central Executive Committee and Board to lead the annual appraisal of the President and Deputy President. Ensures a fair, professional and timely process which takes on board wider feedback. Supports the ongoing development of the President.

- Offers a listening ear and outlet for the President and Deputy where required, noting the above points in relation to their important relationship and support structure through the Chief Executive.
- Supervises the delivery of their remits as employees on behalf of the Board where required. Acknowledges the role of the political processes for all other matters.
- Seeks to ensure a healthy and productive relationship between the President and Chief Executive, as well as the President and the Deputy President.

## **Person Specification (Chair of the Board of Trustees)**

An applicant's covering letter should address the experience, knowledge and skills criteria.

### **Experience**

- Significant management and leadership experience.
- Experience of chairing meetings, report writing and committee work.
- HR or digital communication/marketing experience (desirable).

### **Knowledge**

- Knowledge, understanding and acceptance of the legal duties and responsibilities of Trusteeship and chairing a Board of Trustees.
- An interest in and appreciation of the role of the Open University Students Association, with a willingness to learn more and develop an understanding.
- Knowledge of the Charity Governance Code (desirable).
- Knowledge and insight into the challenges of a member-led or democratic organisation (desirable).

### **Skills**

- Inclusive leadership skills.
- Excellent organisational, administrative and time management skills.
- Excellent interpersonal skills, with the ability to balance tact and diplomacy with willingness to challenge and give constructive criticism.
- IT skills including Microsoft Office.
- Experience as a Charity Trustee and/or Company Director (preferable).
- Experience as the Chair/Vice-Chair of a Board (desirable).
- Experience as a Charity CEO (desirable).

### **Personal Qualities and values**

- High degree of integrity and professionalism.
- Approachable and personable.
- Adherence to Nolan's seven principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

- Commitment to the charity's objects and strategic aims with a willingness to devote the necessary time to carry out the responsibilities of the role.
- Good, independent judgement, impartiality and the ability to think creatively in the context of the organisation.
- Impartiality, fairness and the ability to respect confidences.
- Commitment to equal opportunities and diversity.
- Demonstrates and leads by our organisational values: Integrity; Equality and Inclusivity; Openness; and Collaboration.