

# TRUSTEE ROLE

## CANDIDATE PACK

## Trustee, 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 a Trustee with a background in HR, staffing matters and related expertise.

### Background to the organisation

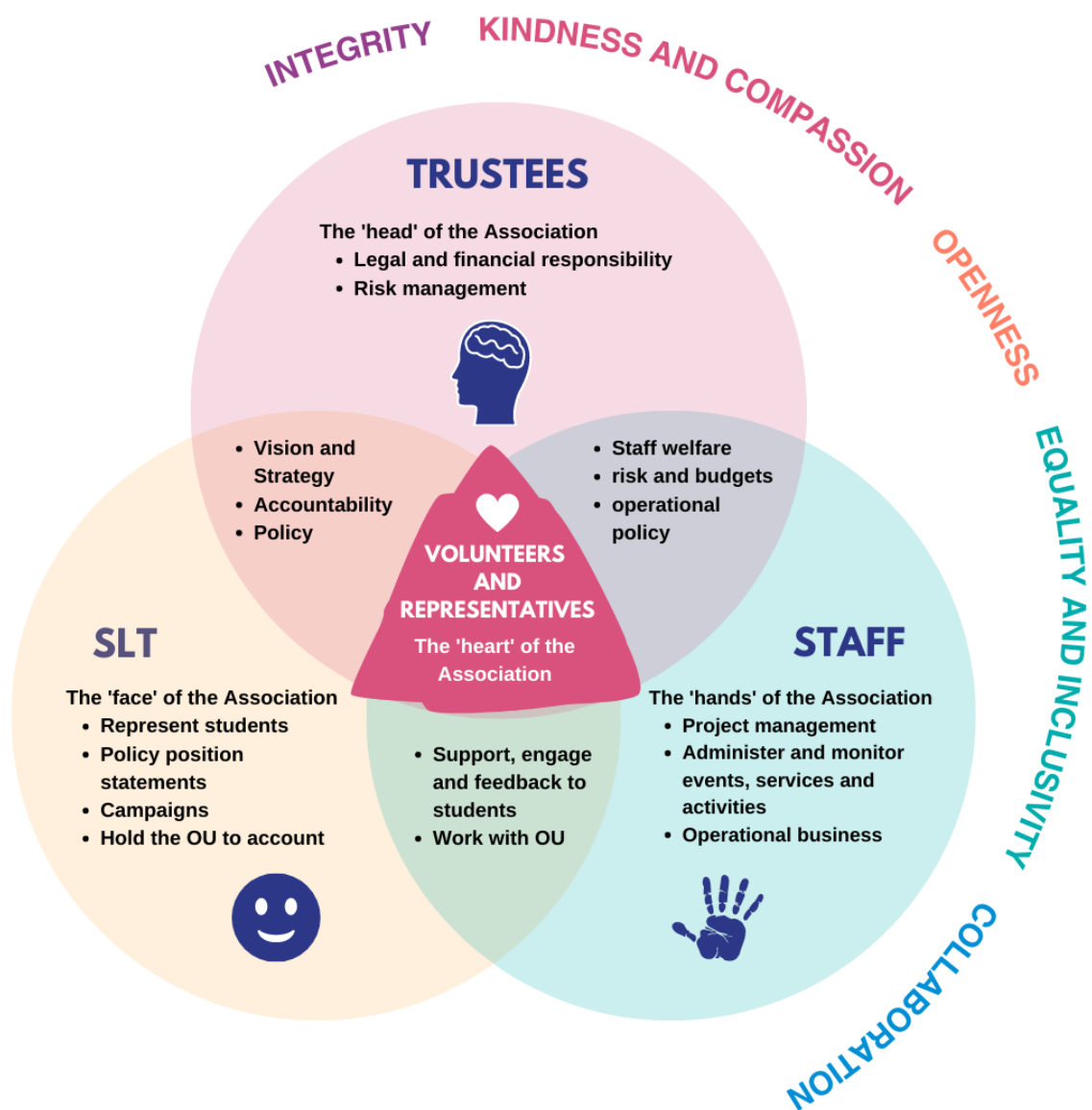
The Open University Students Association is a company limited by guarantee (number 12031028) and a registered charity (number 1183837 and SC049546). We are a Students Union within the definition of the Education Act 1994. Our mission is to make a positive difference for all Open University students.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

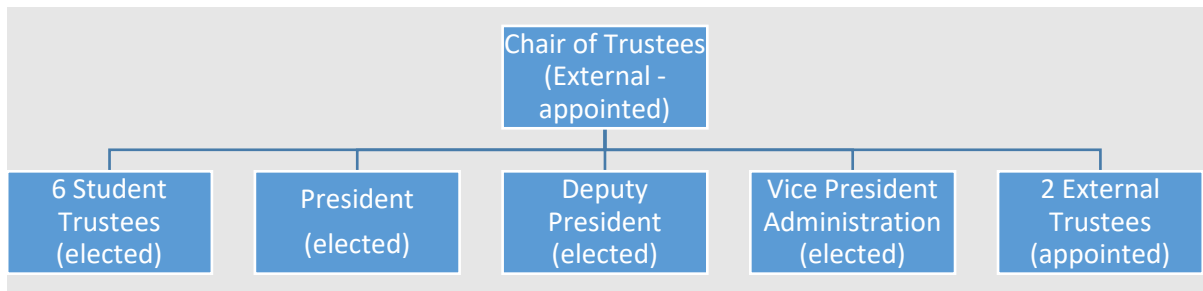
- Defending the principles of equal opportunity and of open access to the University regardless of academic qualifications or financial circumstances.
- Promoting the interests and welfare of students at the Open University during their period of study and representing and supporting students.
- Being 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 Student Leadership Team of student representatives who shape the policy and activities of the Students Association. The Student Leadership Team 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 2024 with a new elected board taking office 1 August 2024.



External Trustees are not elected, they are appointed in their roles following recommendation by the current Board of Trustees and approval by the Student Leadership Team. External Trustees provide the continuity through from the current group into the next. We currently have two external trustees, one of whom is our Chair.

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 work hybrid, to enable work-life balance whilst meeting the business needs of the organisation.

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 a skills audit, the Board is keen to find candidates with Human Resources experience, who would have the time to be part of our Finance, Resource and Risk Committee.

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 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 External Trustee.

### 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 recently approved a brand new strategy for the organisation, and so our new trustee will be joining at an exciting time where they will be able to support



implementation. This ambitious strategy focuses on four core strategic objectives for the period of 2023-2027 which are to:

- Create a welcoming environment and champion accessibility for all.
- Increase engagement through evidence-based decision making.
- Enable students to lead, represent and advocate.
- Embrace change to ensure we are future facing and sustainable.

Our values as an organisation are: Welcoming, Accountable, Bold, Adaptable and Sustainable. More details of our strategy can be viewed on our [website](#).

### **Term length**

We seek to make an appointment until October 2025 as our term limits last 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 Trustees are currently scheduled to meet for their full governing board meetings:

- 6 February 2024 (hybrid)
- 30 April 2024 (hybrid)
- 23 July 2024 (hybrid)

All full board meetings are usually held during business hours, and are hybrid, allowing face-to-face or remote attendance. Full board meetings generally last between 2.5-4 hours depending on the agenda. Breaks are scheduled in.

Finance Resource and risk committee (FRRC) meetings are four times a year, yet to be scheduled, but generally fall a couple of weeks ahead of the full board meeting. FRRC is held entirely online and meetings last roughly 1.5 hours.

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 short evening meeting to cover an urgent matter.

In addition to attending the regular scheduled meetings, External Trustees will also be expected to participate in other ways:

- Attending an induction session with our Chief Executive and Chair of Trustees, which will be arranged at a mutually convenient time.
- Besides the meeting dates, we would anticipate that the time commitment for this role averages out throughout the year to around 2 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 make good use of our online space in between meetings to allow meetings to be focused on important discussion.

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

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

- Attending an all staff huddle 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 of 2024.
- Training and development sessions, including webinars and external events hosted by NCVO and our legal advisors and auditors.
- Occasional optional attendance at social or networking events.

### **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 Chair of Trustees, Chief Executive and other relevant senior staff members as well as by the rest of the Board of Trustees. Alongside this we 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 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. The OU Students Association holds equality and inclusivity as one of our core values and seeks to have a diverse Board capable of representing the community that we serve. We therefore welcome applications from all sections of the community, and work hard to meet all accessibility requirements Board members disclose to us, taking a flexible and supportive approach for all members.

## External Trustee Role Description

In addition to the role description outlined below, Trustees should be mindful of the [Charity Governance Code](#) and relevant Charity Commission guidance.

### Purpose:

The OU Students Association Board of Trustees has the ultimate responsibility for the Association's affairs and exercises its powers subject to relevant legislation in addition to our Articles of Association and Bye-Laws. This includes oversight of the governance, staffing, finances and strategy of the Association. The Board of Trustees delegates the day-to-day management of the Association and its staff team to the Chief Executive.

### Main Responsibilities

1. To ensure that the OU Students Association acts in accordance with its governing document, charitable objects and other guiding documents.
2. To ensure that the OU Students Association complies with all relevant legislation and regulations, including relevant Education Acts and Charity Acts where applicable.
3. To safeguard the effective administration of the Association, including maintaining its financial viability and avoiding activities which greatly risk our reputation, sustainability or students.
4. To approve the Association's strategy, annual budget and the Association's annual financial statements. To consider funding proposals and applications during the course of the budget year as and where necessary.
5. To make an active contribution to the Board of Trustees reaching sound decisions including reading and scrutinising all papers; attending and participating in meetings and on the Trustee online forums; leading discussions and/or meetings where appropriate; maintaining a focus on key issues; building an understanding and appreciation of the Association and our membership; offering own skills and experience; exercising a vote on key matters; participating in sub-committees or working groups as necessary.
6. To add value and actively contribute to the Board of Trustees, offering a considered and reasonable perspective on matters at hand and being unafraid to challenge appropriately.
7. To work with other Trustees and support the Senior Staff team to create a positive, hard-working, inclusive, supportive and successful culture.
8. To seek to empower and support the student voice at all levels of the organisation, including recognising the important role of the Student Elected Officers and Student Leadership Team.



9. To recognise and value the difference between the Student Leadership Team and the Board of Trustees, working to create a joined-up and constructive governance culture.
10. To appoint and receive any reports from the Association's bankers, HR advisors, solicitors and auditors. To consider proposals for external affiliations where necessary.
11. To approve all amendments to the Association's governing documents for submission to a vote of Conference.
12. To appoint, establish the job description, agree the remuneration and annually appraise the performance of the Association's Chief Executive.

**Trustees should be aware that they are jointly and severally liable for the affairs of the Association.**

## Person Specification

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

### Experience

- Human Resources, staffing and related experience.
- Experience of senior committee work and strategic decision making or a desire to develop in these areas.
- Previous experience as a Trustee and/or Company Director (desirable but not essential – we are looking for the right fit, so please reach out to chat to us to find out more, even if you have not been a Trustee before).

### Knowledge

- Can evidence a good understanding and appreciation of the role and context.
- An understanding relevant and current issues for charities and member-led organisations surrounding EDI or digital marketing.
- Working knowledge of the UK Charity Sector and Charity Governance Code (desirable).

### Skills

- Inclusive and collaborative, able to positively contribute to a team.
- Able to exercise good governance, e.g. scrutinising Board papers, contributing positively to discussions, offering own expertise.
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills, including diplomacy and tact.
- IT skills including Microsoft Office.

## Personal qualities

- Meets the eligibility criteria.
- A considered professional approach.
- Strong interest in performing the role and supporting the OU Students Association.
- High integrity, with a strong commitment to fairness and ethical decision making.
- Willingness to devote the time and effort to successfully perform this role, including developing an understanding of the issues at hand and undertaking relevant training.
- Confident and assertive, willing to make decisions that are in the best interests of the organisation.
- Commitment to the Nolan principles.
- Commitment to and prioritisation of equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Willing to learn and develop in the role.
- Able and willing to travel to Milton Keynes for Board meetings or social events (desirable – all meetings are hybrid).