

Candidate brief for the position of **Regius Professor**

October 2026





The Open University

The Open University was founded in 1969 with the mission to: “promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high quality education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential – open to people, places, method and ideas”. We are the only institution worldwide with such a single vision and purpose. We are distinctive and unique. Our mission is still as relevant today as it was then, perhaps even more so.

Defined by our social purpose, we have one of the most recognised and respected brands of any organisation in either the public or private sector. Our bespoke distance-learning delivery and inspired teaching, together with our ability to reach and support students wherever they may be, whatever their circumstances, are what make us unique amongst higher education providers.

We are delighted to invite applications and nominations for the role of Regius Professor of Open Education, one of the most distinguished academic appointments in the world. Regius Professorships are among the highest honours in UK higher education and are held by only a select number of universities. Established by Royal Warrant in 2013, the Regius Professorship of Open Education recognised both The Open University's transformative contribution to learning and teaching and the growing significance of Open Education as a field of scholarship. Today, it remains a unique and highly prestigious position.

We are seeking an internationally recognised scholar whose work has made a significant contribution to understanding and advancing Open Education, or whose research is shaping its future direction. The successful candidate will bring academic distinction, intellectual curiosity and thought leadership, alongside a strong commitment to the role that education can play in creating opportunities, addressing inequalities and improving lives.

50+ years of life-changing learning

We believe that where you start shouldn't limit where you go. That's why most OU courses don't come with formal entry requirements.



In 2023, the OU was awarded overall **Gold** in the Teaching Excellence Framework

2.3 million+ learners have chosen the OU since 1969 and counting...

200,000
current
students

37,000
students declare
a disability

70%
of students work full
or part time

Open, ambitious and inclusive

We proudly play a unique role in society, making higher education open to all and promoting social justice and social mobility.

- We teach students from 160 UK prisons and 30 secure environments
- We partner with 950 employers to teach 2,800+ apprentices 28% of
- OU UK undergraduates live in the 25% most deprived areas We train
- the next generation of nurses and police officers 73% of FTSE 100
- companies sponsoring staff within the OU

The Open University in numbers



Our legacy

- ▶ We have taught over 2.3 million learners since 1969



Revenue

- ▶ £561.9m total income
- ▶ £397.2m from tuition fees and education contracts
- ▶ £123.4m from funding body grants
- ▶ £15.9m from research grants and contracts



Greater reach

- ▶ 82% of our research submitted to REF2021 was world-leading or internationally excellent
- ▶ 111m visitors to our OpenLearn platform since 2006
- ▶ 1,500+ Armed Forces members and their dependents study with us



Our students

- ▶ 37,000+ of our students declare disabilities
- ▶ More than a third of our students have fewer than two A Levels
- ▶ Median age of our new UG-level students is 29
- ▶ 70% of our directly-registered students are already in work
- ▶ More than 40,000 students on validated programmes UK and internationally



Societal impact

- ▶ Partner with 950 employers to teach 2,800+ apprentices
- ▶ Teach in over 160 UK prisons and 30 secure environments
- ▶ Partner with 23 police forces
- ▶ Over 40 UK partners whose qualifications we validate



Our community

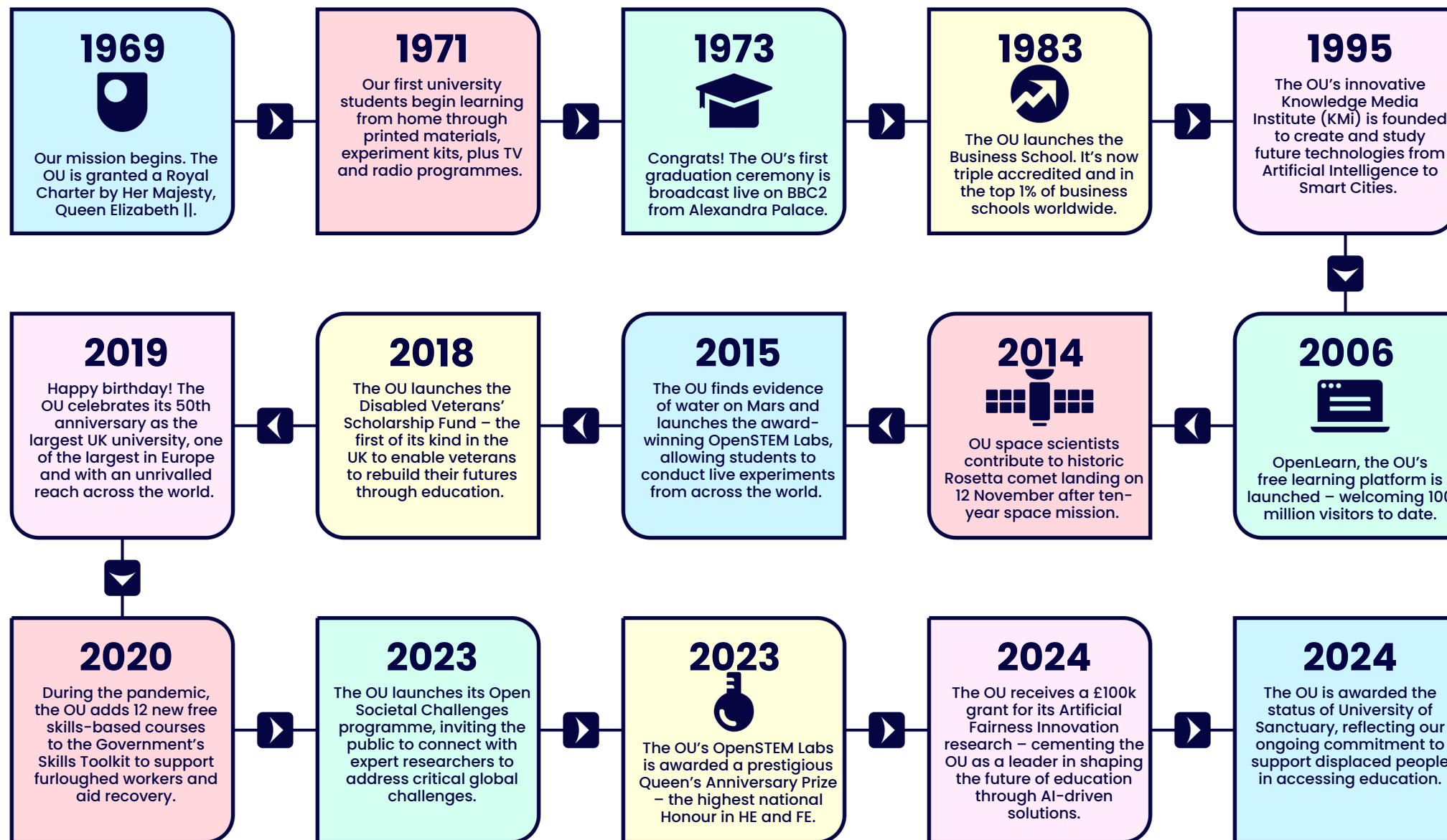
- ▶ We are a Four Nations university
- ▶ 200,000 students
- ▶ Around 10,000 staff



Our scale

- ▶ 450+ undergraduate and almost 140 postgraduate modules offered
- ▶ We receive 350,000+ calls and 250,000+ emails a year
- ▶ 37,000 students use our Virtual Learning Environment on an average day
- ▶ Our students handed in nearly 1.3m pieces of assessed work, and over 160,000 end-of-module assignments
- ▶ Over 2 million alumni

A history of firsts



Our OU family

Every day, OU students prove that the impossible is possible. They are dream-chasers and jugglers, balancing studies with busy jobs, families and social lives. We're proud to support students of all ages and backgrounds, from career changers to school leavers, carers and everyone in-between.

Here are just some of the OU students and graduates who endlessly inspire us to do what we do...



I am so proud to be an OU graduate. If I hadn't studied with the OU, I'd never have set up this purpose-driven business which has become my career. The OU changed me. My determination to

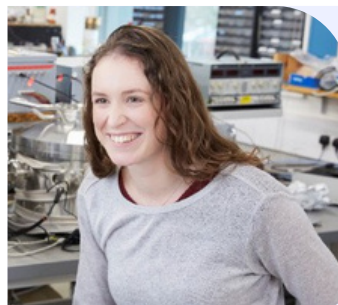
do well came from my OU studies as I learnt that you have to put the work in to get the results. I now make a difference to the world every day and I am so excited to think I might encourage others to do the same.

Ruby, OU graduate & founder of WUKA,
the UK's first reusable period pants



The OU opened up a new direction for me. It's been life-saving and life-changing. I dread to think what might have happened and what might have become of me had I not been given my chance. Looking to the future, I would really like to use my qualification to see how I can help veterans facing similar circumstances to my own.

Steven, OU graduate & Disabled Veterans' Scholarship recipient



I chose the OU for my PhD programme as it matched my interests in both science and engineering in my chosen field of Space Resources. The OU also appealed to me because their projects involved active hands-on experience and not just theory-based

work. I enjoyed the collaborative, interdisciplinary approach – working alongside geologists, physicists, chemists, engineers and more. But what really stood out for me was the inclusive environment at the OU, which accommodated diverse backgrounds and non-traditional standard routes. Achieving my PhD through the OU has had a real positive effect on my career, and I am proud of my association with the University.

Dr Hannah Sargeant, PhD graduate in Planetary Science



One university, four nations

We're a uniquely four-nation university, delivering world-class, flexible education and transforming lives across the four nations of the UK, Ireland and worldwide. We're proud to have an unrivalled scale and influence on shaping today's society.

OU in England



We're the largest provider of undergraduate part-time education in England, with over 99,000 students from every part of the country. Across England and the nations, we work with employers across the public

and private sectors to address important skills gaps and have the unique scale and expertise to make a major contribution to widening participation and access to education. Our cost-effective model of flexible and lifelong learning enables the UK Government to meet economic and social challenges, equipping students with essential skills for the future.

Fact file:

- 47% of part-time UK undergraduates are taught by the OU.
- We offer 200+ qualifications, from short courses to degrees and postgraduate qualifications.
- We're highly rated for student satisfaction – beating the sector average across teaching and academic support.

OU in Scotland



We provide innovative and flexible education for more part-time undergraduates in Scotland than anyone else. We're funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and are accountable to them through the

Outcomes Framework. We have formal partnerships with 16 regional colleges and collaborate with local authorities, the NHS, social care, the third sector and employers across Scotland.

Fact file:

- We're one of the largest universities in Scotland, with over 19,500 students from the Shetland Isles to Galloway.
- We ranked first in Scotland for student satisfaction in the National Student Survey 2024.
- 22% of our undergraduates in Scotland live in remote or rural areas.
- Our Young Applicants in Schools Scheme operates in all 32 local authority areas to help final year pupils access a broader curriculum and transition to university level study.

One university, **four nations**

OU in Wales



We welcome more part-time undergraduates than any other provider in Wales, with over 16,000 students and 300 tutors. We continue to build on successive years of student growth following the introduction of part-time maintenance grants by the Welsh Government in 2018.

Fact file:

- We have seen a 115% increase in student numbers since 2017/18.
- There are OU students in every Senedd constituency.
- We partner with businesses, charities, public bodies and other education providers across Wales to help widen access to education in line with funding council and Welsh Government aims.
- Over 150 companies in Wales sponsor employees to study with us. Since 2020, we've trained the next generation of teachers on our innovative, bilingual PGCE course.
- 48% of our students come from Wales' most disadvantaged areas.

OU in Ireland

We're the only university in Northern Ireland (NI) dedicated to distance learning. With over 7,000 current students, 59% of all part-time students in NI choose to study with us. We work with the Department for the Economy to help address low employment rates, low productivity, low wages and regional imbalances through accessible higher education. We also work with all six Health Trusts in NI and provide a pre-registration nursing programme and NI-specific Social Work Degree.

In Ireland, we've established strong partnerships with employers and continue to influence support for Lifelong Learning. We are well placed to grow our student numbers and to contribute to the OU's international work with Dublin as a base within the European Union.

Fact file:

- We have students in each of the 32 counties across the island of Ireland.
- Our validation partnership with all six regional colleges in NI currently supports the delivery of 51 courses ranging from higher level certificates to foundation and honours degrees.
- In 2024 we marked our 20th consecutive year as the top institution for overall student satisfaction in Northern Ireland through the National Student Survey.
- We provide higher education to over 170 students in prison, working with every prison across the island of Ireland.

Bringing learning to millions

Since we first beamed those late-night BBC lectures into people's homes in the 70s, the OU has continued to use the latest technology and expertise to bring learning to the masses.

Our unique partnership with the BBC has inspired and educated millions of learners for 50+ years. Our expert academics power some of the most beloved BBC productions on screens today, from Blue Planet 2 to Secrets of the Museum. On top of hundreds of hours of programming, we co-create content across radio, social media and digital channels.

Sharing knowledge freely

The OU has always had a radical and pioneering approach to access. In 2006, we launched OpenLearn – offering free courses and educational resources. Anyone in the world can now dip their toe into bite-sized learning for free, 24/7, discovering topics from languages to sport aimed at all levels, from new learners to existing students and educators.

Since then we've partnered with industry and the UK Department for Education to develop courses and have had over 111 millions visits to the site.



Inspiring anyone, anywhere to learn

- ▶ OU-BBC TV and radio was viewed and watched 285 million times in 2022/23
- ▶ We co-produce 35 prime-time TV and radio series every year
- ▶ OpenLearn offers 1,000+ free courses, videos, resources and more
- ▶ OpenLearn has reached 111 million visitors (& counting)



Learn more about our partnership with the BBC

Visit
<https://connect.open.ac.uk/>

World-leading research

The Open University is renowned for world-class research and innovation, which not only underpins our curriculum, but drives tangible change for communities around the globe.

We take a challenge-led approach to our research, utilising our expertise and partnerships to tackle the biggest questions facing our society today, so we can future-proof tomorrow.

Our Open Societal Challenges are focused on three core themes:

Sustainability



We believe combatting the climate crisis also means protecting people's rights and improving living conditions now and for future generations worldwide.

Tackling inequalities



Our passions drive our research, from tackling religious intolerance and online violence against women and girls to the inequalities LGBTQ+ people face, racial and ethnic educational disadvantages and unequal access and opportunities for disabled people.

Living well



Our research addresses complex challenges from preventing and curing diseases like prostate cancer and diabetes, to empowering people to live well into later life and saving children from a dangerous life on the streets.

Revealing the secrets of the Universe

The OU is world renowned for planetary exploration and lunar science and astronomy, proudly partnering with NASA, the UK Space Agency and international organisations on missions to the Moon, Mars and beyond.



Learn more about our world-class research

Visit
<https://research.open.ac.uk/>

Our strategy: Opening Up

OU strategy 2026–2031

Open isn't just who we are. It's what we do.

The Open University was founded on a radical idea: **that opportunity should be open to all.**

That idea is still as crucial as ever – but our world has changed. From bridging skills gaps to learning in the age of AI, here's how we'll change with it.

Creating Societal Impact

Extend access and opportunity through inclusive pathways, impactful research and public value.

Supporting Student Success

Remove barriers to success through flexible, personalised and technology-enabled learning.

Innovation & Partnership

Reach new communities through collaboration with employers, governments and partners.

Our enduring mission:

“We were founded to open doors. This strategy is about opening them wider.”

Living our Values

Openness is more than access. It means creating an environment where people feel supported, valued and empowered to succeed. Through innovation, collaboration and a shared commitment to public good, we will transform lives, strengthen communities and extend our impact across society.



Find out more about our Strategy:

Visit <https://strategy.open.ac.uk/>

Organisation and Governance

The University's governing body is the Council, which focuses on the University's overall strategy, finances, property, staff and students. It is supported by a number of subcommittees, such as Finance and Audit Committees. The Council is chaired by the Pro-Chancellor.

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.



Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho
University Chancellor



Sir David Normington
Pro-Chancellor

University Executive Board

The Vice-Chancellor chairs the University Executive Board in their capacity as Chief Executive of The Open University.

Meet the University's Executive team:

Professor Dave Phoenix

Vice Chancellor

Dave Hall

University Secretary

Vacant

Chief People Officer

Emma Stace

Chief Digital Information Officer

Paul Traynor

Chief Financial Officer

Professor Mark Durkin

Pro-Vice-Chancellor
(Partnerships & Enterprise)

Professor Mark Brandon

Pro-Vice-Chancellor
(Research & Innovation)

Professor Ian Pickup

Pro-Vice-Chancellor
(Students)

Professor Al Laville

Pro-Vice-Chancellor
(Equity, Diversity & Inclusion)

Professor Josie Fraser

Provost & Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Professor Mike Fernando

Executive Dean of the Faculty of Science,
Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

Professor Klaus-Dieter Rossade

Executive Dean of the Faculty of Wellbeing,
Education & Language Studies

Professor Adrienne Scullion

Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Social
Sciences

Professor Keith Schofield

Executive Dean of the Faculty of Business &
Law

Ben Lewis

Principal & Nation Director of The Open
University in Wales

Michael Bower

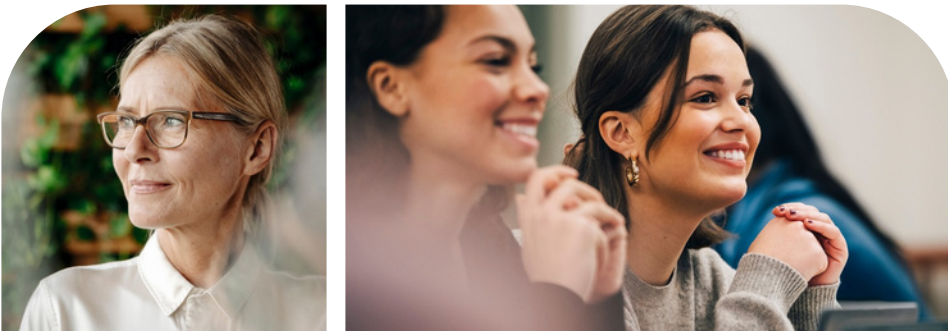
Principal & Nation Director of The Open
University in Ireland

Martin Boyle

Principal & Nation Director of The Open
University in Scotland

The Open University Students Association

The Open University Students Association has been the voice of OU students since 1972, representing their collective needs and ensuring their opinions are heard at the highest levels of the University and beyond. Their mission is to make a positive difference for all OU students.



The Students Association is comprised of three main bodies: the Board of Trustees, the Student Leadership Team (SLT), and a dedicated staff team. This structure is further supported by a network of student volunteers, including representatives from all four Nations.

Students can access various forms of support through the Students Association, including the Student Advice Service, and several student-run support groups. The Students Association also supports over 60 student clubs and societies that are run by, and for, OU students. These clubs and societies bring communities of students together around their shared interests and life-circumstances, from societies in areas such as Law and Psychological, to Fit Club and Grandparents Club.

The Student Voice is pivotal at the University, and where possible, the Students Association works in partnership with The Open University to address student issues and continuously enhance the student experience.

A shared commitment to fostering authentic student engagement in University decision-making is embedded in our co-created Student Charter, which underscores the importance of strong partnerships between staff and students.



About the Role

The Regius Professor of Open Education is one of the most distinguished academic appointments in the United Kingdom and represents a unique opportunity to shape the future of Open Education on a global stage.

Established by Royal Warrant in 2013, the Regius Professorship recognised both the Open University's internationally significant contribution to open learning and the emergence of Open Education as an important field of scholarship. The Chair remains one of the highest honours within the discipline and reflects the University's commitment to research excellence, educational innovation and societal impact.

The successful candidate will be an internationally recognised scholar whose work is advancing understanding and practice in Open Education or in fields contributing to its future development. They will combine world-leading research with intellectual leadership, helping shape national and international conversations around learning, access, participation, technology and educational innovation.

The role sits within the Institute of Educational Technology and reports to Professor Klaus-Dieter Rossade, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies. The appointment offers significant academic freedom within a globally recognised community committed to the Open University mission of opening education to people, places, methods and ideas.

The appointed candidate will steward The Open University's existing world-leading research in Open Education, enhance its global influence and strengthen the University's contribution to national and international conversations about learning, access and educational innovation. They will help shape the future direction of Open Education whilst contributing to a culture of scholarly ambition, collaboration and impact.

Key Accountabilities

Research Excellence and Scholarly Leadership

- Produce internationally recognised research that advances knowledge and practice in Open Education.
- Secure major external research funding and develop strategic research partnerships.
- Supervise and support doctoral researchers and emerging scholars.
- Strengthen the Open University's global reputation as a leader in Open Education research.

External Influence, Policy and Public Engagement

- Act as a visible international ambassador for the Open University and Open Education.
- Influence policy, practice and public understanding through research and thought leadership.
- Develop and maintain relationships with policymakers, funders, educational organisations and international partners.
- Enhance the University's profile through media engagement, keynote speaking and participation in influential national and international forums.
- Help position the University as a leader in shaping the future of education.

Academic Community, Collaboration and Culture

- Foster a vibrant, collaborative and ambitious research culture.
- Connect colleagues, disciplines and communities across and beyond the University.
- Support the development of high-impact scholarship, collaboration and research influence.
- Inspire colleagues to maximise the impact of the University's investment in research and scholarship.

Open Education and Institutional Impact

- Advance the University's mission through research, innovation and scholarship that promotes openness and educational opportunity.
- Explore emerging ideas, technologies and approaches that shape the future of Open Education.
- Build relationships that support research-informed innovation and evidence-based decision-making.
- Provide intellectual leadership on the role of Open Education in addressing societal challenges.
- Ensure research and scholarship deliver meaningful benefits for learners, educators, institutions and society.

Collegiate and Institutional Contribution

- Promote an inclusive, collaborative and respectful academic environment.
- Contribute to institutional committees, advisory groups and strategic initiatives.
- Act as a role model for openness, collegiality and academic citizenship.

Job Description

Essential Criteria

Research Excellence

- An outstanding international research profile, evidenced by scholarly outputs of the highest quality that demonstrate originality, significance and rigour, with work recognised as internationally excellent and predominantly world-leading.
- Evidence of a sustained trajectory of research excellence, normally demonstrated through at least four significant research outputs, including at least three published within the most recent six-year period.
- Research income attributable to the candidate that is normally commensurate with the top fifth of the UK sector benchmark for the relevant subject area within the most recent six-year period.
- Experience as Principal Investigator, or equivalent, on six or more competitively awarded, peer-reviewed research grants (e.g. UKRI, EU or equivalent external funders), together with contributions as Co-Investigator on additional projects.
- An excellent and extensive record of successful doctoral research supervision.
- Evidence of outstanding reach and significance in knowledge exchange, public engagement, pedagogic impact and/or the application of research beyond academia.
- Evidence of an established external research profile, including at least two of the following:
 - Membership of a national or international editorial board;
 - Membership of a national or international conference or research committee;
 - Receipt of prestigious national or international prizes, awards or honours.

Academic Leadership

- Evidence of outstanding leadership with major demonstrable outcomes in complex organisational and strategic environments.
- Evidence of leading and delivering major initiatives or significant change at institutional, sectoral and/or international level.
- Outstanding contributions of analytical and strategic thinking that have solved complex problems and delivered significant organisational impact.
- A strong track record of mentoring, managing and developing others, including supporting career development and progression.
- Active membership of, and significant contribution to, University-level committees, boards, advisory groups or equivalent external bodies.

Desirable Criteria

- Evidence of additional esteem indicators beyond those outlined above.
- Demonstrated achievement at Professor Band 3 level in teaching and/or knowledge exchange where not already evidenced through research and leadership activities.
- Significant external leadership roles, influence, partnerships or income generation not otherwise reflected within the application.
- Experience of shaping national or international policy, strategy or practice through research, scholarship or professional leadership.

How to apply

Key dates

Applications are invited by **9am** (GMT) on **Friday 6th November 2026**.

UL Associates will conduct initial consultations with prospective candidates.

A shortlisting meeting with then take place in mid November.

The interview assessment process will take place late November.

The anticipated start date for this post is **1st March 2027**.

How to apply

For further information and instruction on how to apply, please visit UL Associate's website <https://www.ulassociates.co.uk/job/open-rpoe>

To apply, please submit:

- A current curriculum vitae including the contact details of two referees
- A supporting statement of **no more than three pages** outlining:
 - Your interest in and motivation for the role.
 - Your vision for the future of Open University and the contribution you believe you could make as Regius Professor of Open Education at the Open University
 - How your experience relates to the requirements of the appointment

Informal Enquiries

For a confidential and informal discussion about the role, please contact:

Elle Hurst

Senior Consultant, University Leadership Associates (ULA)

elle.hurst@ulassociates.co.uk

07769 295866

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 going forward. Please also remember to not mention anyone's information or details (e.g. referees) who have not previously agreed to their inclusion.



The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales, and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.