UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX
BRIGHTON

Candidate pack

Chair of Council

November 2026

Contents

1 Introduction from the Vice-Chair of Council

2 Sussex background
About the University of Sussex

3 Governance of the University

5 Role of Council

6 Chair of Council
9 The Role of Vice-Chancellor and President in relation to Council
9 The Role of the University Secretary

10 Selection criteria

12 Expectations



Introduction from the Vice-Chair of Council

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in becoming the next Chair of Council of the University of Sussex. I am delighted that you are considering this opportunity to lead the University's governing body at an important point in Sussex's development.

The distinctive ethos with which Sussex was established nearly 65 years ago still animates our work today. From the start, Sussex challenged convention and fostered critical, and at times dissenting, thinking. It set out to disrupt traditional ways of creating and organising knowledge, and in doing so, developed its own distinctive identity, which fostered a strong sense of community and purpose.

Now in our seventh decade, our early emphasis on innovation, interdisciplinarity, intellectual rigour, and internationalism continues to define Sussex. Our success as a world-leading university is built on these practices and is underpinned by the institutional values that we strive to enact – collaboration, courage, inclusion, integrity, kindness, and openness – and by our foundational commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech.

The higher education sector in the UK faces major challenges, but in a globally interconnected world that urgently needs new ways of thinking and bold interventions, Sussex's future is bright. I am honoured to serve as Chair of Council of the University of Sussex. Working in partnership with the Vice-Chancellor and President and the University's Executive Team, Council is committed to ensuring that the University is well governed, financially sustainable and true to its values, as it advances ground-breaking research, thought leadership and transformational education in the service of the common good.

Council has a central role in overseeing the delivery of Sussex 2035, the University's new strategy which sets out a clear long-term direction for the University, grounded in commitments to human flourishing, environmental sustainability, and digital and data futures. Council's role includes supporting an inclusive institutional culture, promoting equality and diversity, and ensuring that decisions about strategy, resources and institutional performance are aligned with the University's public interest responsibilities and long-term resilience.

Our highly engaged Council is made up of 22 members, comprising the Vice-Chancellor and President, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, 13 independent members, 5 staff members and 2 student members.

We are now seeking an exceptional individual to lead Council through the next stage of Sussex's development. The next Chair will provide inclusive and effective leadership to Council, enabling its members to bring their different perspectives and experience to bear on the opportunities and challenges facing the University, and ensuring that Council remains focused on Sussex's long-term success and the interests of its students and wider community.

The Chair will work in close partnership with the Vice-Chancellor and President, providing support and constructive challenge while respecting the important distinction between governance and executive leadership. They will also play a key role in sustaining strong relationships across the University and championing Sussex, its distinctive values and its ambitions for the future.

It is a rewarding and important role, and I hope that the opportunity to help shape the next chapter of this remarkable University will inspire you to consider joining us.



Tony Bullman
Vice-Chair of Council

Sussex background

About the University of Sussex

Our history

The University of Sussex received its Royal Charter in 1961 and immediately set about offering an alternative to the traditional higher education landscape.

From the start, Sussex was intended to be a new kind of university: challenging convention and fostering critical thinking. It set out to 'redraw the map of learning', disrupting the traditional disciplinary organisation of the academy and creating new interdisciplinary fields of study. Six members of our community have won a Nobel prize, and we have educated world leaders, including the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, who reflected on his time at the University thus: "Sussex said 'inquire all the time, get to know more, learn more, don't be afraid to say I was wrong'. And I think that's an enormous asset."

Today our courses, research, and culture aim to stimulate, excite, and challenge. So, from scientific discovery to global policy, from student wellbeing to career development, Sussex innovates and takes a lead. And today, in every part of society and across the world, you will find someone from Sussex making an original and valuable contribution to positive change.

Now well into our seventh decade, we are currently ranked joint 27th in the UK in the Times Higher World University Rankings 2026. We have 11 subjects rated in the top 20 in the UK in the QS World University Rankings by Subject (2027) and 12 in the global top 200, of which nine are in the top 100. We are especially proud to be ranked 1st in the world for Development Studies for the 10th consecutive year in the QS World University Rankings by subject (2027), reflecting the radically global orientation of our research and education, and the deep rooted commitment, with our on-site partner, the Institute of Development Studies, to impactful research for global social justice. The University of Sussex Business School is 1st for research income in the UK (2021/22-2024/25) and Physics at Sussex 1st in the world for research impact (Shanghai Ranking 2025).

Sussex 2035

In July 2024, the University's Council approved a new 10-year strategy Sussex 2035: Creating Progressive Futures – flourishing, sustainability, and progress for the whole world. Sussex 2035 is about harnessing our collective effort to create progressive futures for people around the world and for our own University. Over the coming decade, Sussex will make a distinctive, inventive, and positive contribution to environmental sustainability, human flourishing, and digital and data futures through our research and innovation, through our educational and student life provision, through our global and civic engagement, and through our institutional life and actions.

Based on the foundational principles of improvement and excellence, distinctiveness, ethical relations, accountability, adaptability and resilience, and financial sustainability, Sussex 2035 commits us to taking strategic action to enable Sussex to thrive as a comprehensive research-intensive, educationally excellent, student-centred university. We will build the strength of our University community, ensuring financial sustainability and developing fit-for-purpose infrastructure, driving improvement and excellence in all that we do, and enhancing our adaptability and resilience in the face of external pressures and social, technological, and environmental change. We will ensure that we are a first-choice university for students and staff, in which every member of our community feels that they are in the best place to realise their goals, a place where they can develop, be themselves, and do their best work, and where we fully embrace diversity of background, identity, belief, thought, discipline, and method. We will preserve and make the most of our beautiful historic campus and our location on the South Downs and in the Living Coast UNESCO Biosphere region.

The full Sussex 2035 strategy can be read here.

Governance of the University

The constitution of the University and its organisational structure and principles are set out in the Charter, Statutes and Regulations, which provide the University with its legitimacy and status as a corporate body.

The Royal Charter of 1961 that established the University of Sussex specified that the University shall have a Council, Senate and Vice-Chancellor. Council is the University's senior governing body, and its role is to act in the best interests of the University as a whole, ensuring it strategically delivers its mission to high standards with the necessary financial stability and long-term sustainability.

Senate is the senior academic body of the University and responsible to Council for academic standards and the direction and regulation of academic matters.

The Vice-Chancellor and President is the Chief Academic and Administrative Officer of the University, and as the Chief Executive is accountable to the Council for the delivery of the University's strategy, performance and overall stewardship. She is also the University's Accountable Officer in relation to the Office for Students.



The University's statutory documents on the powers and functions of Council (Statute V and Regulation 5) are available on the university website.

Council is one of the three Statutory bodies of the University (the others being Senate and Court). Council's role is to act in the best interests of the University as a whole, ensuring it strategically delivers its mission to high standards, prioritising financial stability and long-term sustainability. It does this by:

- Discharging its responsibilities in relation to all relevant legislation, including the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA), and other statutory and regulatory requirements.
- Determining the University's mission, strategic direction, strategic objectives, and values. It seeks and receives assurance that the strategic plan is in line with the above and will meet the prevailing legislative and regulatory requirements.
- Monitoring performance against strategic objectives and against appropriate external benchmarks
- Ensuring an effective framework is in place for risk management, control, and governance.
- Meeting the requirements deriving from the Charter and Statutes other than those matters delegated to committees or to individuals.
- Monitoring the Institution's and its own effectiveness.

Council's annual cycle includes three full meetings, two shorter interim meetings, and an away day for deeper discussion and development. There are currently five committees of Council:

- Audit and Risk Committee
- Finance, Resources and Performance Committee
- Remuneration Committees A and B
- Nominations and Governance Committee

The Chair of Council provides leadership to Council and plays an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of the University's governance arrangements. In addition to chairing meetings of Council, the Chair maintains regular engagement with the Vice-Chancellor and President, the University Secretary and members of Council, and works with Chairs of Council's committees to support effective and coherent governance across the University.

The role requires a significant level of engagement beyond formal meetings, including preparation for Council business, regular meetings and briefings, participation in key University events and activities, and engagement with members of the University community and external stakeholders as appropriate. Further information about the expected time commitment is provided later in this pack.

Council and Committee meetings are normally held in person on campus, reflecting the value placed on effective discussion and collegiate working, though virtual attendance may be used where appropriate.

Biographies of Council Members can be found on the university website.

Role of Council

Powers and accountability of Council

Council is collectively responsible and accountable for all institutional activity[1] and conduct. Council delegates its powers and responsibilities to individuals and bodies within the institution to ensure the effective operation of the University and delivery of its charitable objectives.

Council members

All members of the governing body (including students and staff members) share the same legal responsibilities and obligations as other members.[2] Each member has personal liability for decisions made by Council. Members are bound by collective responsibility and are required to respect the confidentiality of Council proceedings.

All decisions taken by Council are done so collectively, with all members acting in the capacity of a single body.

All members of Council are expected to:

- Observe the highest standards of honesty, integrity and objectivity.
- Act in good faith and be accountable in accordance with the Charter, Statutes and Regulations of the University, current legislation, and regulation.
- Invest time and energy to understand how the University works (including opportunities and risks in the broader operating environment).
- Work in a collegial fashion with fellow Council members and the Executive, respecting confidentiality and accepting collective decision-making.
- Accept responsibility to review their own performance.
- Recognise that authority resides only with the Council as a whole and not in its individual members, and support decisions of Council once taken. The Code of Conduct for Council members can be viewed on our website here.

Members should always act ethically in line with both the principles of public life (the Nolan principles) and the institution's own ethical framework, and in the interests of the institution, its students and staff and other stakeholders.[3]

[1] HE CUC Code 2020
[2] Higher Education Code of Governance (CUC, September 2020)
[3] Higher Education Code of Governance (CUC, September 2020)

The Chair of Council

The Chair of Council is responsible for the leadership, effectiveness and culture of the Council in the delivery of its business. As Chair of its meetings, they promote the effective conduct of Council business, ensuring that members work together constructively, take collective responsibility for decisions, and have confidence in the integrity of Council's processes.

The Chair plays a central role in fostering a culture that reflects the University's values and Council's Code of Conduct. They model and promote collaboration, courage, inclusion, integrity, kindness and openness, whilst encouraging constructive challenge, respectful debate and collective responsibility. The Chair ensures that all members feel able to contribute fully to discussions and decision making and that the Council operates in accordance with the principles of public life (Nolan principles).

The Chair is ultimately responsible for ensuring that Council operates effectively, discharges its responsibilities in a transparent, accountable and professional manner and focuses on matters that require its attention. This involves the exercise of sound judgment, good governance practice and appropriate management of any actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

Through leadership of Council, the Chair plays a key role in the governance of the University without becoming involved in the day-to-day executive management that is the responsibility of the Vice-Chancellor & President. The Chair maintains a constructive working relationship with the Vice-Chancellor & President, the University Secretary and other Senior Officers. The roles of Chair of Council and Vice-Chancellor & President are formally distinct and provide an appropriate balance of support, challenge and accountability within the University's governance framework.

Key responsibilities

The Chair of Council will:

Leadership and culture

- Chair meetings of Council in accordance with the Charter, Statutes and Regulations and, seek advice and support from the University Secretary on matters of governance, ensuring that Council contributes effectively to the achievement of the University's strategic objectives.
- Set the agenda, style, and tone of Council meetings, promoting effective decision-making, constructive challenge and respectful debate.
- Model and promote the behaviours expected under the Council's Code of Conduct, reflecting the University's values of collaboration, courage, inclusion, integrity, kindness and openness, and fostering a culture of constructive challenge and collective responsibility.
- Foster an environment in which all members feel able and encouraged to contribute their expertise, experience and perspectives effectively.
- Promote a culture of continuous improvement, reflection and effectiveness within Council and its Committees.

Governance and effectiveness

- Ensure that Council operates effectively and in accordance with the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) Higher Education Code of Governance and other relevant governance requirements.
- Exercise authority delegated to the Chair by Council in accordance with the University's governing documents and Scheme of Delegation.
- Ensure that Council gives appropriate and proportionate attention to the University's financial sustainability, principal risks and the effectiveness of its assurance arrangements, enabling Council to exercise robust oversight and make well-informed decisions about the University's long-term resilience. In doing so, ensure that Council remains mindful of the University's status as a charity and its collective responsibilities for the stewardship of the University's resources and assets in furtherance of its charitable purposes.
- Model high standards of transparency and disclosure, including the appropriate declaration of interests, and ensure that actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest are identified and managed appropriately in Council's work.
- Ensure that Council receives timely, relevant and high-quality information to support effective oversight, assurance and decision-making.
- Ensure that Council members are appropriately supported, inducted, developed and engaged to enable them to contribute to the best of their ability.
- Oversee effective arrangements for evaluating Council effectiveness and the performance and development of Council members.
- Ensure that Committees report appropriately to Council and contribute effectively to the University's governance and assurance framework.
- Work with Committee Chairs to support the effective operation of Council's Committees, ensuring that they report appropriately to Council and contribute effectively to the University's governance and assurance framework.
- Serve as a member of the Remuneration Committee and as Chair of the Nominations and Governance Committee and attend other Council Committees where appropriate.

Key relationships

- Establish a close and constructive working relationship with the Vice-Chancellor & President, providing support, advice and challenge whilst respecting executive responsibility.
- Work in partnership with the Chair of Senate to support effective academic governance, transparency and collaboration between Council and Senate.
- Maintain effective working relationships with the University Secretary, Council members, and senior officers of the University.



Appointments, performance and succession

- Lead arrangements for the recruitment and appointment of Council members, ensuring an appropriate balance of skills, experience, diversity and independence.
- Lead arrangements for the performance review and development of Council members.
- Address concerns regarding the conduct or performance of Council members, ensuring that any action is taken in accordance with the University's governing documents, Council's Code of Conduct and agreed procedures. Where removal from office may be appropriate, work with the Nominations and Governance Committee to ensure that recommendations are considered by Council in accordance with the relevant provisions.
- Conduct an annual appraisal of the Vice-Chancellor & President and oversee appropriate objective setting and performance review arrangements and make recommendations to the Remuneration Committee accordingly.
- As Chair of Nominations and Governance Committee, oversee succession planning and make recommendations regarding appointments to Council and its Committees.
- Lead the appraisal of the University Secretary in relation to their responsibilities as Secretary to Council, including contributing to the setting and review of relevant objectives, recognising that the University Secretary may hold wider executive or institutional responsibilities.
- Attend induction, training and development activities as required to carry out the role effectively.

External engagement and representation

- Engage with relevant external regulatory bodies as appropriate, including the Office for Students, representing Council and supporting appropriate assurance regarding the effectiveness of the University's governance arrangements and compliance with public interest governance principles.
- Engage actively with the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) and other relevant sector networks, representing Sussex as appropriate and maintaining awareness of developments in higher education governance and practice.
- Act as an ambassador for the University and represent Council and the University externally as appropriate.
- Play an active role in University life, including attending graduation ceremonies and other significant University events as appropriate.
- Chair the University Court in accordance with the University's governing arrangements.
- Perform the functions of the Chancellor, in the ex-officio capacity as Senior Pro-Chancellor, in the absence of the Chancellor (except for conferring of degrees).

Time commitment

Council meets three times per year, and the Chair will be invited to attend subcommittee meetings (most of which are three times per year) in addition to other responsibilities mentioned. Time commitment should account for around two days per week.



The role of Vice-Chancellor and President in relation to Council

The Vice-Chancellor and President is responsible for the executive management of the University and its day-to-day direction. The responsibilities of the Vice-Chancellor in relation to Council business include:

- Managing the University effectively including, where appropriate, consulting with staff and Senate, and bringing to Council proposals for development or change affecting the institution's future development, where it is necessary and/or appropriate to do so.
- Implementing the decisions of Council or ensuring that they are implemented through the relevant part of the institution's management structure.
- In line with Office for Students (OfS) requirements, Council appoints a senior officer as the University's Accountable Officer. At Sussex, the Vice-Chancellor and President is appointed as the Accountable Officer and is responsible to the governing body for ensuring compliance with the terms and conditions of funding.

The role of the University Secretary

The University Secretary is responsible for supporting the effective operation of Council and the University's governance arrangements, and acts as a key source of independent governance advice to Council and its members. The responsibilities of the University Secretary in relation to Council business include:

- Advising the Chair, Council and its Committees on matters of governance, including the University's Charter, Statutes and Regulations, the CUC Higher Education Code of Governance and other relevant regulatory and governance requirements.
- Supporting the Chair in ensuring that Council and its Committees operate effectively, including through the provision of appropriate information, advice, induction and development for Council members.
- Ensuring that Council's business is conducted in accordance with the University's governing documents and established governance processes, and that decisions and delegations are appropriately recorded and followed through.
- Supporting Council in maintaining effective relationships with the University's executive and academic structures, while safeguarding the independence and integrity of the University's governance arrangements.
- Maintaining a direct and effective relationship with the Chair of Council, including providing independent advice and raising matters directly with the Chair where appropriate.

Selection criteria

Chair of Council – Person specification

The University is seeking an experienced, credible leader who will share Sussex's values and ambitions and bring the strategic judgement, independence and inclusive leadership required to lead Council effectively.

Essential Criteria

The successful candidate will demonstrate:

Leadership and governance

- Significant leadership experience at a senior level within a complex organisation, with the credibility, judgement and strategic perspective to lead the governing body of a large and diverse university.
- Substantial experience of effective governance and of working with, or as a member of, a Board or equivalent governing body.
- The ability to provide inclusive and effective leadership to Council, fostering a culture of openness, respectful debate, constructive challenge and collective responsibility, and enabling all members to contribute effectively.
- The ability to model high standards of conduct, integrity and accountability and to promote and reinforce behaviours and culture expected under Council's Code of Conduct.
- A clear understanding of the distinction between governance and executive management, with the ability to provide appropriate support and challenge while respecting executive responsibility.
- The ability to support the development and effectiveness of individual Council members and to lead appropriate performance and effectiveness review processes.
- The ability to provide clarity through complexity and uncertainty.
- Knowledge and/or experience of higher education or similarly complex, mission led environment.

Strategic judgement and stewardship

- Strong strategic judgement, including the ability to navigate complexity and competing perspectives, build consensus where appropriate and support effective collective decision-making.
- The ability to understand and engage with Sussex's strategic priorities and context, and to ensure Council maintains appropriate focus on the delivery of the University's ambitions and long-term success.
- A clear commitment to ensuring that the interests, experience and success of students are central to Council's deliberations and decision-making, and an understanding of the importance of meaningful student engagement and student voice in University governance.
- Experience of engaging with significant organisational opportunities, risks and challenges, with the ability to interrogate complex financial, performance, risk and assurance information.
- Experience of operating effectively in a complex, regulated and publicly accountable environment.

Relationships and influence

- Highly developed interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence, with the ability to establish constructive relationships with the Vice-Chancellor and President, University Secretary, Council members and other stakeholders while maintaining appropriate independence.
- The ability to engage effectively with a diverse range of perspectives and stakeholders, including students and staff.
- The ability to challenge in a way which is firm when necessary, but always fair and productive.
- A highly collaborative approach.
- The credibility and communication skills to act as an effective ambassador for Sussex and represent the University externally.

Values and commitment

- A strong commitment to the purpose and values of the University of Sussex, its educational and academic mission, and to ensuring that the University delivers an excellent and inclusive experience for its diverse student community.
- Ability to provide leadership consistent with its distinctive character as an inclusive, interdisciplinary and internationally engaged university.
- A demonstrated commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and to the Principles of Public Life.
- Personal integrity, independence, and sound judgement.
- Excellent organisational skills.
- The capacity and willingness to devote the time necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of the role and to participate fully in induction, development and effectiveness review.

Desirable criteria

- Understanding of the regulatory and governance environment within which UK universities operate.
- Experience of chairing a Board, governing body or significant committee.
- Experience of organisational transformation or providing governance and leadership through significant strategic change.



Expectations

Time commitment and term of office

In the spirit of charity trustees, our members of Council are not remunerated, but members may reclaim all reasonable travelling and similar expenses incurred in the course of University of Sussex business. We support members travelling to the University by offering overnight accommodation.

The Chair of Council is expected to devote sufficient time to the role to provide effective leadership to Council and to engage fully with the life and work of the University. The role involves a significantly greater time commitment than that of other independent members of Council.

In addition to chairing Council meetings, Nominations and Governance Committee meetings and the annual Council Away Day, the Chair will be expected to attend relevant Council committee meetings, maintain regular contact with the Vice-Chancellor & President and the University Secretary, engage with Council members and committee Chairs between meetings, and participate in key University events and activities. The Chair will also meet with students, staff and other members of the University community and undertake appropriate external engagement on behalf of Council and the University.

The precise pattern of activity will vary during the year, and candidates should have sufficient flexibility to respond to significant or unforeseen matters when required. While some meetings and briefings may take place virtually, the Chair will be expected to spend regular time on the University's campus and to develop a strong understanding of and connection with the Sussex community.

It is anticipated that the successful candidate will be appointed in Spring 2027, allowing for a period of induction and handover with the current Chair before taking up the role on 1 August 2027.

Independent members will normally be appointed for an initial three-year term and may be eligible for reappointment, up to a maximum of nine years' total service. The Chair of Council will be appointed for an initial three-year term in that role, subject to Council appointment and review.

Office for Students requirements

The Office for Students sets out governance principles to safeguard public interest that apply to all registered providers which includes the requirement for members of the governing body to be 'fit and proper' persons.

The definition of fit and proper persons, and what might indicate otherwise is set out on p. 197 of the OfS regulatory framework at Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education in England (**officeforstudents.org.uk**).

Any appointment will be subject to completion of a Fit and Proper Declaration and related enhanced checks such as DBS.

Selection and appointment process

Minerva is acting as an executive search agency and advisor to the University of Sussex on this appointment.

To apply please send a full curriculum vitae and a covering letter to **sussexcouncil@minervasearch.com**

The closing date for applications is noon on Monday 11th January 2027.

Selected candidates will be invited to meet with Minerva colleagues (ideally in person but if not virtually) before the shortlisting meeting, which will take place in mid-February.

We anticipate that shortlisted candidates will be invited to attend the University of Sussex for interview in early March 2027.

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.

