



Position Specification

British Council
Chair Succession

Overview

The British Council is seeking to appoint an experienced and exceptional leader as Chair of its Board of Trustees. They must be passionate about building cultural and educational connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide to support peace and prosperity. The successful person must be credible with senior stakeholders within and outside government and able to operate at the highest levels on a global stage.

The role will require an individual capable of leading the Board through a period of significant financial, organisational and strategic challenge, bringing clarity, discipline and direction to governance and decision-making.

The British Council

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

Founded in 1934, The British Council is a charity incorporated by Royal Charter – one of the largest in the UK – with a substantial English teaching and assessment revenue-generating arm that helps to support our purpose. It is also classified as a public corporation, as over 51% of revenues come from earned income sources, and is a non-departmental public body that receives grant in aid from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

The British Council is uniquely positioned: operating globally, combining charitable purpose with income-generating activity, and functioning under public service scrutiny. It demands exceptional governance and strategic leadership.

In 2024-25, revenue was £1 billion, with over £702 million from English teaching and exams businesses. The organisation is currently navigating a period of financial pressure, in part due to the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic and in part from growing digital competition. This will require careful oversight and successful delivery of a multi-year transformation programme. With a global reach of 600 million people through face-to-face, digital, and publication and broadcast channels, the British Council is a critical part of the UK's soft power and influence building system.

The British Council delivers its mission through uniquely combining the UK's rich expertise in arts and culture, education and the English language, its global presence and relationships in over 100 countries, and its unparalleled access to young people.

The British Council shares UK values and explores ideas. The organisation enables people to have difficult discussions and to find common ground. It creates mutually beneficial relationships between the people of all four nations that make up the UK and other countries. This helps strengthen the UK's global reputation and influence, encouraging people from around the world to visit, study, trade and make alliances with the UK.

The organisation works directly with individuals to help them gain the skills, confidence and connections to transform their lives and shape a better world in partnership with the UK. It supports them to build networks and engage in critical thinking, to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications.

The team works with governments and partners in the culture, education, and English language sectors, across all four nations of the UK and globally. Working together they make a greater difference, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world.

The British Council takes a long-term approach to building relationships and operates at arm's length from government. More details about the governance and funding of the British Council are available at:

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/how-we-work>

About the Board

The British Council's Board of Trustees comprises 12 members, including the Chair.

Trustees are guardians of purpose, strategy, reputation and assets – both tangible and intangible – and are ultimately accountable for the organisation's actions and performance. They ensure that the British Council has a clear vision, mission and strategic direction and ensure that this is communicated to stakeholders and to the wider public. The Board also agrees the British Council's Corporate Plan and approves the British Council's annual accounts.

The Board currently has five formal sub-committees: Audit and Risk; Finance; Commercial; Nominations & Governance; Remuneration and People.

Biographies for trustees can be found in Appendix I.

The Role

The Chair provides strategic leadership to the Board of Trustees and ensures that the organisation has robust governance, a clear strategic direction, and the capability to deliver its mission in a highly scrutinised and rapidly changing operating environment.

In particular, the Chair will play a crucial role in strengthening Board effectiveness, ensuring clarity of priorities and supporting the organisation as it implements a significant transformation programme to reach long-term financial sustainability.

Key Responsibilities

Board Leadership and Governance

- Lead the Board in setting the organisation's strategic direction and holding the Executive to account for delivering the strategy.
- Foster a collaborative, high-trust Board culture where diverse perspectives are encouraged, and collective accountability is upheld.
- Plan and chair seven Board meetings per year, ensuring high-quality papers, evidence-based structured discussion, effective prioritisation and timely well-informed decision-making.
- Ensure that the British Council complies with all legal, regulatory and financial requirements and that corporate governance is of the highest standard.
- Ensure that Trustees discharge their legal, fiduciary, and public service responsibilities, including scrutiny of risk, financial sustainability, and organisational transformation.
- Maintain a constructive, supportive, and appropriately challenging relationship with the Chief Executive; uphold clear separation between executive and non-executive responsibilities.
- Oversee annual Board effectiveness reviews and ensure skills-based, diversity-led succession planning for Trustees.
- Chair the Nominations & Governance Committee.

Strategy, Transformation and Organisational Change

- Provide oversight and challenge on the delivery of the multi-year transformation programme, including reskilling, modernisation and changes to the funding model.
- Ensure the Board monitors and responds to emerging strategic pressures such as ensuring Grant-in-Aid expenditure reflects good value for money, financial sustainability, and global risk.

Stakeholder, Ministerial and FCDO Engagement

- Serve as a senior representative of the organisation to UK Ministers, senior officials, and key governance bodies.
- Act as a visible ambassador for the organisation in the UK, leveraging their personal credibility and network to amplify the British Council's voice, promoting its work and safeguarding its reputation. Opportunities for

international engagement may occur on an exceptional basis for key stakeholder engagements or major strategic events.

- Ensure compliance with the Framework Agreement, including annual assurance processes and approvals, while safeguarding organisational independence.
- Support the British Council's role in delivering value to the UK's international objectives while maintaining arm's-length independence.

Trustee Appointments and Board Composition

- Oversee all Trustee recruitment, appointment, reappointment and induction processes, including working closely with the FCDO to lead the selection process for a new Deputy Chair as and when required.
- Conduct annual one-to-one meetings with all Trustees and ensure their development and performance needs are supported.

Person Specification

Candidates must demonstrate the ability to oversee the British Council's response to significant challenges over the next few years. These include shaping the strategy so it remains relevant, oversight of transformation in its business and funding models, the need for considerable re-skilling and culture change in the context of ever-growing public scrutiny, and the associated risks. It means looking for opportunities and efficiencies. This requires long-term focus, but also agility.

The Chair will be responsible for providing strong and effective leadership to the Board, ensuring the Trustees discharge their legal and public service responsibilities including the identification and management of organisational risks. The Chair will work inclusively, constructively and flexibly, enabling the Board to fulfil its responsibilities for the effective governance of the charity and protection of the wider reputation of the British Council.

Essential Experience and Skills

- **Board and organisational leadership:** Significant leadership experience at Board or Chair level in large, commercial and international organisations, including the ability to lead effectively through ambiguity, build consensus, and drive clear and timely decision-making.
- **Transformation and financial oversight:** A track record of overseeing successful organisational transformation and delivering financial sustainability within a complex commercial environment, including navigating strategic change, risk, and competing stakeholder pressures.
- **Stakeholder and government credibility:** Demonstrable ability to build trusted relationships and communicate effectively with a wide range of senior stakeholders, such as Ministers, officials, regulators, partners, funders, and international stakeholders.
- **International perspective:** Experience operating internationally, with sound judgement and an understanding of the opportunities and operational complexities associated with leading global organisations across multiple markets and geographies.
- **Alignment with mission and values:** Strong affinity with the British Council's mission and values, including a genuine interest in cultural relations, education and the UK's international influence and soft power role. The judgement, integrity and commitment required to lead a major UK institution operating under public scrutiny.

Desirable Experience and Skills

- **Charity experience:** Prior demonstrable commitment to a not-for-profit organisation that shares an affinity with the arts or education sectors.

All candidates must be aligned with the [Nolan Principles of Public Life](#), set out in Appendix II, and adhere to the [Charity Commission](#) guidance for trustees.

Time Commitment

The expected time commitment for the Chair is approximately 3-4 days a month. Time flexibility is also expected as there are periods where more intense input and commitment may be required. There will also be opportunities for selective international engagement, both in support of the British Council's ambassadorial role and to deepen understanding of its global operating model. The Board meets a minimum of seven times a year and more often as required. Edited minutes of its meetings are available to the public.

The appointment is a three-year term with the possibility of extension for a further three years.

While the role is not remunerated, all travel and other reasonable expenses will be covered.

Board dates for 2026/27 can be found in Appendix III.

Additional Details

Office accommodation is available in the British Council's London building, along with administrative support.

Candidates must be British or dual British citizens.

The British Council carries out a series of checks pre-appointment including those required by the Charity Commission and the basic DBS check.

How to Apply

The recruitment process is being undertaken by Russell Reynolds Associates on behalf of the British Council. The closing date for applications is **23:55 BST on Sunday 12th July 2026**.

To apply, candidates must complete two steps:

1. Apply via the Public Appointments website (mandatory)

All candidates must apply through the Cabinet Office's Applicant Tracking System (ATS). You will need to: Create (or log into) your account at: [Apply for a public appointment - GOV.UK](#) and complete your personal profile.

Complete the diversity monitoring questions.

This step is mandatory for all applicants and ensures the appointment process meets the required standards of fairness, transparency, and reporting.

2. Provide your application materials to Russell Reynolds Associates

In parallel, candidates should also submit their application by email to responses@russellreynolds.com quoting reference **2605-088L** in the subject heading of the email. All applications will be acknowledged.

Your submission should include:

- Your **CV**, with educational and professional qualifications and full employment history, including an explanation of any gaps in your employment history, and details where possible of budgets and numbers of people.
- A short **supporting statement** of no more than two A4 sized pages explaining why this appointment interests you and how you can evidence your suitability for the role, with particular reference to the essential criteria.

Timeline

An indicative timeline is shared below, please note this may be subject to change:

Milestone	Date
Closing date for applications	12 th July
<i>Presentation of prospective candidates to agree longlist</i>	w/c 20 th July
RRA conducts interviews with longlisted candidates	27 th July - 28 th August
<i>Presentation of prospective candidates to agree shortlist</i>	w/c 31 st August
Informal conversations with relevant stakeholders	w/c 7 th and 14 th September
Final panel Interviews	w/c 21 st September

Should you wish to speak with someone before submitting an application, please contact responses@russellreynolds.com quoting reference number **2605-088L**.

Overview of the application process

This appointment will be conducted in the spirit of a public appointment process, reflecting the principles of fairness, openness and merit-based assessment.

The assessment process will comprise the following stages:

1. Application review and longlisting

Russell Reynolds Associates will review all applications for eligibility and provide the Panel with a structured assessment of candidates against the published criteria.

2. Longlist assessment

Russell Reynolds Associates will conduct interviews and due diligence on longlisted candidates to support the Panel's consideration of shortlist recommendations.

3. Shortlisting

The Panel will agree a shortlist of candidates to progress to final interview.

4. Stakeholder engagement and referencing

Shortlisted candidates may be invited to meet key stakeholders and Ministers as part of the process. Appropriate referencing and due diligence will also be conducted.

5. Final interviews and appointment

The Panel will interview shortlisted candidates and make recommendations to Ministers, who will provide their approval for the preferred candidate. The preferred candidate will then be elected by the British Council Board in line with the British Council's Royal Charter.

Security clearance

The successful candidate will be required to complete appropriate pre-appointment and security checks.

Equality and diversity

We are committed to attracting candidates from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences. Diversity of perspective strengthens public bodies and improves decision-making. Diversity information collected during the process will be anonymised and will not be visible to the Panel.

Disability confident

We are committed to making reasonable adjustments throughout the appointment process and operate within the Government's Disability Confident framework. Candidates who meet the essential criteria and request consideration under the scheme will be guaranteed an interview.

Appendix I: Trustee Biographies

Baroness Wendy Alexander of Cleveden, Deputy Chair & Chair of the Remuneration and People Committee

Baroness Wendy Alexander of Cleveden joined the Board of Trustees in October 2022. Wendy became Deputy Chair of the Board in December 2024. She is a Fellow of The Royal Society of Edinburgh, Chair of the Electrotechnical Sector Joint Industry Board and serves on SEP LLP's Investment Advisory Board. She is a former chair of Times Higher Education's International Education Advisory Board, Education, Venture Partner at Emerge Education, and served as Scotland's Trade & Investment Envoy for Higher Education and Patron of Social Investment Scotland. Earlier in her career, Wendy worked in international consultancy, moving into government and public service, serving in Scottish Cabinets holding the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, Transport and Communities portfolios and subsequently working in international higher education.

Second term: 01 October 2025 – 30 September 2028

First term: 01 October 2022 - 30 September 2025

Richard Hookway, Trustee & Chair of the Finance Committee

Richard Hookway is an international business leader having had a 35-year career, latterly as a senior executive at BP and Centrica. In addition to energy, he is experienced in transformation, business services, and all aspects of IT and Digital. He joined the British Council Board of Trustees in October 2021. He is currently a Non-Executive Director at Royal Vopak N.V and the UK Atomic Energy Authority, where he chairs the Audit and Risk Committees for both entities. He is also chair at Swim England, the governing body for the sport in the country, in addition to his trustee role at the British Council. Richard has previously served on the boards of Naftogaz of Ukraine, Parkland Corp, Deptford City Challenge, the Houston Grand Opera and as a member of the CBI President's Committee. Richard graduated in Mathematics from Manchester University and has an MSc in Management (Sloan Fellow) from Stanford University.

First term: 12 October 2021 – 11 October 2024

Second term: 12 October 2024 – 11 October 2027

David Lefevre, Trustee

David Lefevre is Professor of Practice (Digital Innovation) at the Imperial College Business School and a serial Edtech entrepreneur. He is Chairman of Insendi, a learning platform company now part of Study Group, an expert-in-residence at the Imperial Enterprise Lab and co-founder of Tutello, an AI tutoring company. In the late 1990s, David worked on Edtech projects at the British Council offices in Tokyo, Athens, Milan and London.

First term: 12 October 2021 – 11 October 2024

Second term: 12 October 2024 – 11 October 2027

Malcolm Press, Trustee

Professor Malcolm Press CBE DL was appointed as Vice-Chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University in 2015, having previously held positions at the Universities of Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester and UCL. Malcolm is an ecologist who has studied the impacts of climate and environmental change in northern Europe and the Arctic, the regeneration of tropical rain forests in Malaysian Borneo, and the impact of parasitic weeds on subsistence farming in sub-Saharan Africa. Malcolm is currently a trustee of the British Council and English National Opera (ENO), and President of Universities UK (UUK). Previously, he has served as president of his subject association, the British Ecological Society, and has also served as a trustee of the UCAS, the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, and WWF-UK, as a council member of the National Trust, and as a board member of the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education (IfATE). He was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2022 in recognition of his contributions to education.

Second Term: 16 September 2023 - 15 September 2026

First term: 16 September 2020 - 15 September 2023

Sushil Saluja, Trustee & Chair of the Commercial Committee

Sushil Saluja is senior business leader and advisor based in London, focused on international business, technology-led transformation and education. He has over 30 years' prior experience at Accenture. He led business units for EMEA (based in London) and Asia Pacific (based in Hong Kong), and has launched FinTech accelerators in Hong Kong and Dubai. Sushil has been active in education through the delivery of higher education to Malaysian students through local colleges and British universities. Sushil graduated in engineering from Pembroke College, Cambridge. He was a Trustee of the Princes' Teaching Institute (PTI) and is a Governor of the University of Greenwich.

First term: 1 September 2020 – 31 August 2023

Second term: 1 September 2023 – 31 August 2026

Paul Woodgates, Trustee

Paul brings many years of experience in strategy, operations and change in the education sector. He built and ran the international education practice of PA Consulting where he worked with a wide range of organisations including governments, regulators, funding bodies and frontline education providers (particularly universities). His experience is in delivering major programmes to define strategy, improve outcomes for learners, transform support services, and enhance efficiency. Paul is a qualified Chartered Accountant. Across his career, he has worked as an auditor, consultant, programme leader and change manager in a range of organisations particularly in the public sector in the UK and overseas. In addition to his role at the British Council, he is Deputy Chair of the Board of Governors of De Montfort University, a non-executive director of Advance HE and a governor of St Chad's College, Durham.

First term: 11 September 2023 – 10 September 2026

David Todd, Trustee & Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee

David is a Chartered Accountant who spent his career as a financial sector partner with the accounting firm KPMG, working in London and New York. He worked primarily with large international banks, leading a mixture of audit and governance/risk advisory projects. Alongside his KPMG career, David was also previously a trustee and audit/risk committee chair for two of the UK's large international development agencies. Since leaving KPMG in 2019, David has taken up a portfolio of non-executive board roles, chairing audit or risk committees. He is currently a director at Lloyds Bank Corporate Markets and the UK subsidiaries of Assured Guaranty (a US insurer). David graduated in Mathematics from Bristol University.

First term: 13 May 2025 - 12 May 2028

Mariella Frostrup, Trustee

For over four decades, Mariella has been at the forefront of UK media as a leading journalist, broadcaster, author, and cultural commentator. She has tirelessly promoted the intrinsic value of arts and culture to wider society and the importance that they connect with and are accessible to all. Mariella's name is synonymous with arts and literature, having presented the UK's leading book programmes, cultural shows and judged its highest literary and arts awards. She was the first non-elected member of the Royal Academy's Council for a full six-year term, dealing with all issues pertaining to the running of the RA including financial, curatorial and reputational. As a broadcaster she has created, presented and produced many flagship television and radio shows/documentaries and been a lead columnist across the arts, culture and news. She has been entrusted with almost every prominent UK arts award, being a member of judging panels from the Booker to the BAFTAs, RIBA to the Turner Prize. She was awarded Doctor of Arts from Nottingham University in 2009 for her lifelong work and achievement in arts and culture. Mariella is also a leading figure in the UK's gender equality movement and a driving force behind gender equality in the workplace. She co-founded the annual Women in Work Summit (@WiWSummit), is the Government's Women's Employment Ambassador, chairs the advocacy group Menopause Mandate, and is a Save the Children Ambassador. Mariella is a Royal Society of Literature fellow and a BAFTA member. More recently, she has become a Trustee of the V&A.

First term: 13 May 2025 – 12 May 2028

Yaw Nsarkoh, Trustee

Yaw trained as a chemical engineer. He was to spend the majority of his three-decade long career with Unilever plc, in the consumer goods sector, playing roles in the supply chain, marketing and in general management. He has deep intercontinental breadth in his career experience. A certified professional coach he has very rich experience in modern corporate governance, including the full sweep of Sustainability. Yaw has a keen interest in all matters connected with development, particularly the pursuit of intercultural, interdisciplinary and international approaches to achieve greater inclusiveness in human society.

First term: 13 May 2025 – 12 May 2028

Kate Marsh, Trustee

Kate is an experienced non-executive and executive director with deep expertise in international digital and media industries, gained over a 30-year career. She is Non-Executive Chair of indie games company Devolver Digital Inc. and Non-Executive Director of FTSE 100 Games Workshop Group plc, where she chairs the Remuneration Committee. Kate also serves as a Governor at the University for the Creative Arts. Kate has held senior executive roles with global media companies including Amazon, MGM, Sky, GroupM, Sony Pictures and the BBC. She has served at board level for Sony Pictures Entertainment European companies and Mediahuis Ireland (formerly INM plc) – the home of the Belfast Telegraph and the Irish Independent. Before embarking on a portfolio career, Kate led the international expansion of MGM+ International, the storied studio's branded streamer outside the US. Kate holds a BA (Hons) in English Language & Literature from Newcastle University and is an alum of the National Broadcasting School where she trained as a radio journalist.

First term: 28 May 2025 – 27 May 2028

Neil Wigan, Trustee

Neil Wigan is Director General Strategy and Delivery at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). Previously, Neil was His Majesty's High Commissioner to the Republic of Kenya from July 2023 until September 2025 and Ambassador to the State of Israel from June 2019 to June 2023. Neil also served as Director for Africa at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) from November 2015 to September 2018, British Ambassador to Somalia from June 2013 to July 2015, and British Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo from March 2010 to March 2013. Neil has also worked in the Cabinet Office, working for the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Adviser, and on Middle Eastern and EU economic issues within the FCO.

First term: 30 September 2025 – 29 September 2028

Appendix II: The Nolan Principles

Principles of public life

The [Seven Principles of Public Life](#) (also known as the Nolan Principles) apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder.

1. Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

2. Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

3. Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

4. Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

5. Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

6. Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

7. Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Appendix III: 2026/27 Board Dates

All meetings typically take place between 11:00 and 15:30 at British Council headquarters in Stratford, London.

2026

July: Tuesday 7
September: Tuesday 22
November: Tuesday 3 (Strategy day)
December: Tuesday 8

2027 *(These dates are provisional and have yet to be confirmed)*

February: Tuesday 9
March: Tuesday 23
May: Tuesday 11 (UK Region TBC) reception and dinner night before)
July: Tuesday 6
September: Tuesday 21
November: Tuesday 2 (Strategy day with dinner night before)
December: Tuesday 7