College of West Anglia



Candidate brief for the position of **Chief Operating Officer**

FEA EXECUTIVE SEARCH



Welcome

Chief Operating Officer

Thank you for your interest in the role of Chief Operating Officer at the College of West Anglia. We are delighted that you are considering joining our vibrant and ambitious community at such an important time.

At the College of West Anglia, our vision is simple yet profound: “changing lives through learning.” This ethos is at the heart of everything we do, inspiring us to deliver outstanding learner outcomes and to drive positive social and economic transformation across our region. As a senior postholder, appointed by the Corporation, you will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of our college, ensuring that we remain at the forefront of educational excellence, innovation and inclusivity.

This is a unique opportunity to join a college with a strong reputation for its broad, responsive curriculum and its commitment to educational, economic and civic development across our region. Our leadership team is dedicated to fostering a learner-centred, inclusive culture, where kindness, integrity, high performance and collaboration are not just values, but everyday practices. We are seeking a visible and ambitious leader - someone who will model and advance these values, and who will inspire, empower and deliver even stronger outcomes.

As Chief Operating Officer, you will act as a trusted strategic advisor to the Principal & Chief Executive Officer and the Corporation, providing professional leadership across Finance, Human Resources, Health & Safety, Funding and Property Services. You will help shape the College’s strategic direction, strengthen financial resilience and operational effectiveness and lead on governance, commercial strategy, sustainability and major capital investment programmes.

We believe that exceptional leadership is defined by visibility, approachability and a genuine commitment to the wellbeing and success of both staff and students. If you share our passion for education, our values and our ambition to make a lasting difference, we would be delighted to receive your application.

We have appointed FE Associates to support us with this crucial appointment. Prior to submitting an application, interested parties should arrange an initial conversation with our FE Associates lead consultant, by emailing Jo.Johnston@fea.co.uk, to discuss the role.

We look forward to discovering how your vision, expertise and leadership can help us continue to change lives through learning.

With best wishes

Gill Rejzl
Chair of Corporation

David Pomfret
Principal and Chief Executive





Job Description

Title: Chief Operating Officer

Grade: Senior Postholder

Reports to: A senior postholder role appointed by the Corporation and line managed by the Principal/CEO

Responsible for: Assistant Principal - Funding, Performance & Projects, Head of Finance, Head of Human Resources, Head of Property Services, Health & Safety Officer

Job Purpose

The Chief Operating Officer will act as a trusted strategic advisor to the Principal & Chief Executive Officer and the Corporation, providing professional leadership across Finance, Human Resources, Health & Safety, Funding and Property Services while ensuring the College remains financially resilient, operationally effective and well positioned to deliver its strategic ambitions.

The postholder will participate fully in determining the strategic direction of the College, work with governors, senior leaders and other managers to develop executive strategies for the College and will champion efficient and effective service delivery alongside serving as the College's most senior financial officer.

[Note: This Job Description is not definitive or exhaustive but is provided to give the postholder an indication of the range of activities, duties and responsibilities concerned with the employment and may be subject to review and revision at any time at the discretion of the Corporation if, in the interest and efficiency of the service, it should be deemed necessary.]

Key Duties and Responsibilities

Strategic Leadership

- As a member of the executive team, participate fully in determining the strategic direction of the College, ensuring that the College is well-positioned to respond to the needs of learners, employers and communities.
- Lead on the development of strategies and plans that enable the effective delivery of high-quality professional services, championing a learner-focused approach and ensuring that the provision of such services meets the needs of staff, students, funding providers, regulators and other partners.
- Lead on the College's financial strategy, ensuring financial health whilst enabling sustainable investment in outstanding teaching, learning, estates, technology and the learner experience.
- Lead on financial planning processes including the development of short, medium and long-term plans and the annual budget setting process, ensuring an accurate annual budget is presented to governors for approval with clear KPIs to monitor the financial performance of the College.
- Contribute as a member of the senior leadership team to the development, implementation and monitoring of the College's strategic and business plans.
- Through accurate, timely and responsive information and reporting, support the delivery of effective College governance, taking the executive lead for Finance & General Purposes Committee and Audit & Risk Committee, and maintain excellent working relationships with College governors.
- Represent the Principal/CEO and College at internal and external meetings as required and ensure positive relationships are built and maintained with key stakeholders, including funding providers and regulators.
- Lead the development and delivery of commercial strategies that maximise income generation, improve operational efficiency and support the long-term financial sustainability of the College.
- Lead the College's approach to environmental sustainability and ensure estate and operational strategies support the College's net zero ambitions.



Financial Reporting, Compliance and Control

- Ensure regular and accurate financial reports are provided to governors and managers in a timely manner, including long-term financial plans, budgets, management accounts/forecasts and cash flow forecasts.
- Ensure effective procurement and contract management arrangements are in place, securing value for money and compliance with public procurement legislation.
- Work closely with the Principal/CEO to meet external financial performance expectations and regulatory requirements and ensure that the College resources are used in line with the requirements of the Department for Education and other funders and within the College's own financial regulations.
- Ensure that appropriate financial controls are in place to safeguard the efficient and effective use of public funds and the College's own resources.
- Ensure full compliance with financial regulations, statutory obligations and funding body requirements and ensure the College is well positioned in relation to external and internal audits, including the annual end of year and regulatory audit.
- Support external funding bids, contract negotiations and commercial performance monitoring where required.
- Develop the financial capability of budget holders and support performance improvement across the organisation.



Strategic Leadership of Professional/Corporate Services

- Champion a customer-focussed culture across the delivery of the College's professional services functions, ensuring that provision evolves to meet the changing needs of the College.
- Provide supportive, ambitious and aspirational leadership to the functional leaders of the College's professional services, ensuring they are operating in support of the College's strategic ambitions and maintaining excellence in service delivery.
- Promote a high-performance, inclusive and values-led culture that reflects the College's One College ethos and supports continuous improvement.
- Support the functional leaders to ensure that effective strategies and plans are in place, regularly updated, and delivered in line with College budgets and plans, i.e. strategies and plans for workforce, estates/accommodation, digital and technology.
- Provide executive leadership for major capital investment programmes, ensuring projects are delivered safely, on time, within budget and realise intended benefits.
- Act as the accountable executive lead for health, safety and organisational resilience, ensuring statutory compliance and a proactive safety culture across the College.
- As an executive leader and senior postholder, lead by example and act as a role model for staff and students, promoting a culture of continuous improvement and professional development.
- Promote collaboration across teams and ensure that professional services functions are well-connected to the College's curriculum, teaching and learning operations.




REPRESENTATIVE
College of West Anglia
2023-2024 STUDENT

Person Specification

Qualifications

Essential

- Membership of a relevant professional body, i.e. ICAEW, ACCA, CIMA or CIPFA.
- Qualified to degree level or equivalent.
- Evidence of continuous professional development.

Desirable

- Higher-level leadership/management qualification.

Experience

Essential

- Significant experience of leading and managing multi-million-pound budgets within a large, complex organisation.
- Demonstrable track record of strengthening financial performance and contributing to the maintenance of a strong financial position through effective financial planning, governance and resource management.
- Successful senior leadership experience in a role involving strategic and operational responsibility for financial planning and operations.
- Experience of senior leadership within a complex, highly regulated operating environment with a focus on public service delivery.
- An established leader of people and team-builder who has led staff across a range of corporate services functions.
- Experience of preparing and presenting comprehensive financial reports, forecasts and management information for senior leaders, governors and non-execs.
- Experience of overseeing internal and external audits.
- Experience of strategic planning, implementing strategies and plans to drive improvements in service delivery.
- Experience of working within established risk management frameworks.

Desirable

- Experience of leading finance and operations in the education sector (i.e. further/higher education or academy trusts).





Personal Attributes

Essential

- A visible role model for staff and students.
- Ability to work at pace when required but with a sense of thoughtfulness and curiosity.
- The leadership resilience to cope with competing priorities, tight deadlines and multiple stakeholder expectations.
- Commitment to continuous professional development and to promoting a culture of development in others.
- Able to work collaboratively with Governors, SMT and managers.
- Able to prioritise effectively and work within budget constraints.
- Able to understand and optimise risk.
- Professional, dependable and able to represent the College appropriately at internal and external meetings.
- A supportive leader who promotes a positive culture yet works with high expectations and ambitions.

Knowledge/Skills

Essential

- Comprehensive understanding of organisational risk management, assurance and regulatory compliance.
- Strong strategic leadership and planning skills.
- Excellent financial management, planning, control and forecasting skills with a strong understanding of organisational financial sustainability.
- Strong people leadership skills with the ability to maintain a positive but ambitious culture across teams.
- Ability to work with external stakeholders, funders or regulators.
- Ability to produce accurate, effective and timely management information.
- Knowledge of a range of some other, non-financial professional services functions.
- Understanding of Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Financial Regulation.
- Skilled at leading change in a positive and proactive manner.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills, with the ability to present complex financial and operational information clearly to leaders, regulators, governors and stakeholders.

Desirable

- Knowledge of the further education funding methodology.
- Knowledge of further education business planning processes.
- Knowledge of strategies across a range of non-finance professional services (i.e. workforce, estates, digital etc).

Benefits and Wellbeing

The College of West Anglia is great place to work and has a wide range of benefits for its employees, including:

- Generous annual leave entitement
- Contributory pension scheme
- Staff development and course waivers
- Trade unions
- Flexible working opportunities
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Preferential rates at local gyms
- Childcare
- Healthy workforce scheme
- Staff discount scheme
- The Salon and Novus Restaurant
- K9 Dog Grooming Parlour
- Salary Sacrifice Scheme - Cycle to Work

To find out more click here



How to Apply

We have retained FE Associates to support us in finding an outstanding individual to inspire excellent practice across our organisation. The application process is outlined below.

Initial Discussion and Recorded First-Stage Teams Interview

Prior to submitting an application, interested parties should arrange an initial conversation with our FE Associates lead consultant, by emailing Jo.Johnston@fea.co.uk, to discuss the role before the closing date. ***Once it is agreed for you to proceed with an application, the lead consultant will schedule a first-stage interview via Teams with you which will take place before the closing date and will be recorded.*** Once this interview has been scheduled, you should submit your application.

Please visit **www.fea.co.uk/job/cwa-coo** and complete the registration form to access the online application form and the equality and diversity form. At Step 2: Submitting your application, click Apply now.

Shortlisting and Invitation to Interview

After the closing time/date, our lead consultant will send all applications and recorded first-stage discussions to the college for shortlisting. Once the shortlist has been agreed, candidates will be notified by the lead consultant and shortlisted candidates will be invited to a formal interview/selection process with the college.

Safer Recruitment and Due Diligence Checks

Applicants are advised that, as part of the statutory guidance on Keeping Children Safe in Education, colleges/training providers are advised to make arrangements for an online search as part of due diligence on shortlisted candidates. The searches are aimed to assist in identifying things said or done that may harm the organisation's reputation or make the candidate unsuitable to work with children, young people and vulnerable adults. Where a cause of concern arises from the online search, a risk assessment will determine whether the concern is of such a nature that it is appropriate to exclude a candidate from the process or whether a clarification discussion, before or during an interview, is needed.

Key Dates

Closing date for applications: 9am on Monday 30 November 2026.

Interviews to be held on Monday 14 December 2026.