



UNIVERSITY OF
DERBY



University of Derby campus

Chief People Officer

University of Derby

Chief People Officer

Introduction



We are a values-led, applied university with a clear long-term ambition set out in our Strategic Framework 2018–2030: to be an applied university of today and for tomorrow, delivering excellence and opportunity for our students, our staff and the region we serve. People are central to achieving this ambition and to everything we do.

Located in the heart of England, the University of Derby is the only university in Derbyshire.

We offer industry-relevant, expert teaching across foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate provision, alongside a growing research portfolio. We are proud of our outstanding facilities and the quality of our academic community, reflected in our award of Gold in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023, recognising our excellence in student experience and outcomes.

We recognise that an outstanding student experience can only be achieved through a high-quality staff experience. Our People Strategy, aligned to our Strategic Framework, sets out how we will deliver our ambitions through the people we employ and the culture we create. The Chief People Officer (CPO) is the executive owner of this strategy, ensuring that people, culture, leadership and organisational capability are fully aligned to institutional priorities.

As CPO you will be joining an institution that understands and values the life-changing power of education. As a key member of our Executive team, the CPO provides strategic leadership for the University's people agenda and is accountable to the Vice-Chancellor for attracting, developing and retaining a high-performing, inclusive workforce, while ensuring strong governance and compliance. Operating at the heart of our leadership and decision-making structures, the CPO plays a critical role in translating our strategic ambition into sustainable organisational performance.

The Role



As CPO you will provide strategic leadership for the University's people agenda and is accountable for attracting, developing and retaining a high-performing, inclusive workforce that enables the University to deliver its ambitions. Operating at the heart of executive leadership and governance, the role is central to translating strategic intent into sustainable organisational performance and impact.

This is a high-profile and influential leadership role within a fast-moving and increasingly complex environment, characterised by financial challenge, regulatory change and intense competition for talent. We are seeking a CPO who brings energy, insight and ambition; someone who can lead modern, innovative and inclusive approaches to employment, organisational development and workforce planning. As expectations of work, leadership and inclusion continue to evolve, the CPO will play a defining role in positioning the University of Derby as an agile, progressive and attractive employer of choice.

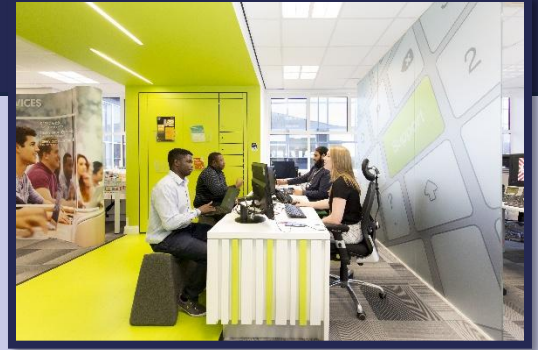
The CPO leads the development and delivery of integrated strategies across talent, reward, performance, engagement, wellbeing and inclusion, creating a culture that enables innovation, collaboration and continuous improvement. The role requires deep expertise in employee relations and employment legislation, alongside the judgement and confidence to ensure that policies and decisions are robust, ethical and aligned with both sector best practice and the University's values.

Working closely with the Governing Council and University Executive, the CPO provides assurance that the University meets its legal, regulatory and sector obligations in relation to people and equality, diversity and inclusion. The role champions evidence-based decision-making, using high-quality data and insight to support transparency, informed consultation and proportionate risk-taking, while fostering a strong organisational growth mindset.

Beyond the institution, CPO represents the University nationally, engaging with higher education networks and external partners to shape and influence people related policy and practice.

People Experience and Culture

People Experience and Culture (PEC) is a high-performing professional services directorate with a clear purpose: to engage, enable and support our workforce to succeed. The team plays a central role in shaping a positive, inclusive and high-performance culture across the University, ensuring that our people are equipped, supported and inspired to deliver excellence for our students, partners and communities.



The CPO will join a strong, committed and capable team with a shared focus on attracting people whose values align with our own and who bring a diversity of personal and professional experiences. PEC works in close partnership with colleagues across the institution to enable outstanding service delivery, while also supporting individuals to achieve their own career and personal goals in an environment that respects and values everyone's contribution.

PEC plays a vital role in supporting academic excellence and organisational success. The team contributes directly to the quality and sustainability of academic performance by attracting and developing talent, enabling clear and equitable career progression, and supporting the creation of strong talent pipelines aligned to the University's strategic and academic priorities. This is a collaborative, forward-looking function that combines operational excellence with strategic insight and organisational development capability.



PEC brings together a broad and complementary set of specialist teams, the team includes a core HR Team that comprises of resourcing, operations, systems and insights, business partnering, strategy, reward and employee relations. It also includes a Talent, Culture and Inclusion team whose remit includes: transformation, organisational design and culture change, equity, inclusion and wellbeing, talent management, development and performance.

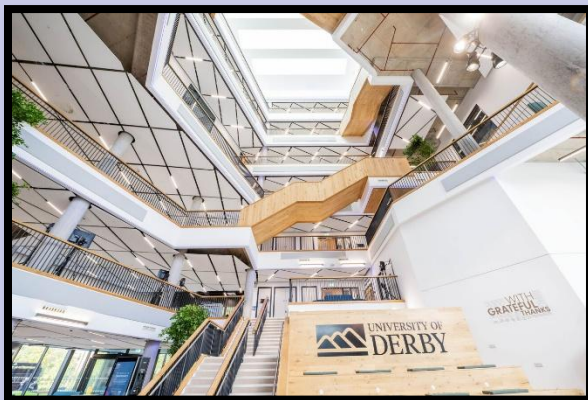
The University of Derby

We are an ambitious, innovative and modern applied university, offering industry-relevant, expert teaching from foundation and undergraduate degrees through to postgraduate study and research. Our applied identity shapes how we teach, research, partner and operate, placing strong emphasis on real-world impact, professional practice and organisational agility.



Our values; People, Bold, Future-Focused and Brilliance, were shaped by our staff and define how we work, lead and deliver. These values provide the foundation for our culture and inform how we attract, develop and support our colleagues.

We hold a long-established reputation as a powerful regional university, with a growing national and international profile. Our excellence in learning, teaching and student experience has been recognised through our Gold award in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023, placing us among the top universities in England for student experience and outcomes.



This success is underpinned by the expertise, commitment and professionalism of our staff, alongside sustained investment of more than £200 million over the past decade in outstanding facilities, including our Business School, STEM Centre, Forensic Training Facility and NHS-standard hospital ward.

Our academic community combines professional expertise, applied research and innovation to foster talent, support skills development and strengthen links with industry. Alongside traditional degree routes, we deliver apprenticeships from levels 2 to 7, working with major employers such as Rolls-Royce, the NHS and Toyota.

The University of Derby

We also have a significant and growing online learning portfolio, extending our reach nationally and internationally and creating a more diverse, distributed workforce model that requires inclusive, flexible and forward-looking people strategies.



As a university committed to social mobility and opportunity, we work to open doors to education and lifelong learning for people of all ages and backgrounds. Our role in Derby's membership of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities reflects our ambition for inclusive lifelong learning and global impact. Internally, this mission places equity, inclusion and wellbeing at the heart of our people agenda and leadership responsibilities.

As a Civic University, we are deeply connected to the economic, social and cultural life of Derby and Derbyshire. Through our Civic University Agreement, we work with partners to drive local recovery and regeneration, support skills development and strengthen regional resilience.

Our commitment to delivering excellence and opportunity for our students, staff and region is embedded in our research, innovation and knowledge exchange activity. We are committed to research that delivers real-world impact, supported by an applied and interdisciplinary approach.



Our research is focused across six academic themes aligned to local and global challenges: Biomedical and Clinical Science, Business, Economics and Social Policy, Creative and Cultural Industries, Data Science, Public Services, Zero-Carbon

These themes inform our academic priorities and shape our approach to talent, capability development and workforce planning, ensuring our staff and students benefit from research-informed teaching and meaningful societal impact.

Strategic Framework 2018–2030

Our Strategic Framework, launched in 2018 and refreshed to reflect a rapidly changing external environment, guides the University to 2030. It provides a clear sense of purpose while allowing flexibility in how we respond to political, economic and sector-wide change.



Since its introduction, the University has made significant progress against its ambitions, including national recognition for teaching excellence and the growth of research, innovation and impact. Our innovation and research activities have expanded significantly, with world-leading and internationally excellent research recognised through the Research Excellence Framework 2021.

We have supported over 2,000 SMEs through collaborative research, innovation and business support, and developed strong partnerships with global and regional organisations. Our public engagement approach, delivered through the Civic University Agreement, has been recognised with an NCCPE Award, reflecting our commitment to meaningful and future-focused engagement with our communities.



Students are central to the Strategic Framework, which is underpinned by a clear commitment to delivering excellence and opportunity across the full student lifecycle. The Framework emphasises the provision of a high-quality, inclusive and applied learning environment that enables students to fulfil their potential, succeed in their chosen careers and make a positive contribution to society.

Delivering a long-term strategy in a period of sustained change presents both challenge and opportunity. Agility, resilience and adaptability are therefore critical. Our Strategic Framework allows us to flex the journey while remaining clear on the destination, and people are central to that success.

Our full Strategic Framework can be found at:
<https://www.derby.ac.uk/about/strategicframework/>

People Strategy

Our People Strategy sets out how we deliver the University's long-term ambitions through our people, recognising that an outstanding student experience can only be achieved through a high-quality staff experience. It positions people as central to institutional success and focuses on creating a high-performance, values-led culture in which colleagues feel supported, included and enabled to give their best.

The Chief People Officer is the executive owner of the People Strategy, accountable for ensuring that people, culture, leadership and organisational capability remain fully aligned to the University's Strategic Framework and values, and that our workforce is future-ready, engaged and equipped to deliver excellence for our students, communities and partners.



The strategy acknowledges a changing and volatile higher-education environment and the need for agility, innovation and resilience, ensuring that our people practices evolve in response to changing expectations of work, leadership and workplace experience.

At its core, the People Strategy priorities attracting, retaining and developing diverse talent; embedding inclusion and wellbeing into everyday practice; and strengthening leadership capability at all levels. It emphasises flexible and inclusive ways of working, evidence-based decision-making, and sustained engagement with colleagues through listening and consultation.

Our staff are central to delivering this mission, and the Chief People Officer plays a critical role in ensuring the University has the organisational capacity, capability and culture required to meet its civic and strategic ambitions.
<https://www.derby.ac.uk/about/people-strategy/>



Job Details - Role Summary

As a key member of the University's Executive team, the Chief People Officer (CPO) provides strategic leadership for the University's people agenda and is accountable to the Vice-Chancellor for ensuring the institution attracts, develops, and retains a high-performing, inclusive workforce while maintaining robust governance and compliance standards.

The CPO leads the development and delivery of strategies for talent, reward, performance, engagement, wellbeing and inclusion, embedding a culture that fosters innovation, collaboration, and organisational growth. A critical aspect of the role is a deep understanding of the factors affecting employee relations and the legislative framework governing employment, equality, and workplace practices. The post-holder ensures that policies and decisions are legally sound, ethically robust, and aligned with sector best practice, mitigating risk and safeguarding the University's reputation.

They ensure that the Governing Council and University Executive receive timely assurance of compliance with all legal, regulatory, and sector requirements, in relation to people and equality, diversity, and inclusion. They ensure that people decisions are driven by robust data and analytics, enabling evidence-based approaches that promote transparency, consultation, and proportionate risk-taking, while cultivating an organisational growth mindset.

The CPO also represents the University in national higher education forums and with external stakeholders, influencing policy and practice on people and governance matters. In addition, the role provides strategic leadership for people-focused transformation and change programmes that strengthen institutional capability, resilience, and sustainability through effective workforce planning and governance.

As CPO, the post-holder develops and champions the University's people strategies, ensuring equity, diversity, and inclusion are embedded in all activities and that the University remains agile and competitive in a rapidly evolving higher education landscape. They also provides oversight of employee health, safety, and wellbeing, ensuring these areas align with organisational people priorities and fostering strong collaboration between the teams focused on Equity and Inclusion, Wellbeing, Occupational Health, EAP, and Health & Safety.

Job Details - Principal Accountabilities

1. Shape and deliver the University's people strategy as a core enabler of institutional success, supporting the Vice-Chancellor and collaborating with the Executive team to develop and execute strategic plans that secure the University's future.
2. Provide leadership and oversight of People Experience and Culture functions, including all aspects of Human Resources and the Talent, Culture and Inclusion team, ensuring these areas achieve their strategic objectives and deliver measurable impact for the University.
3. As a member of the Executive Team, provide constructive challenge to ensure decisions place people at the heart of the University's strategy while balancing institutional priorities, sustainability, and long-term impact.
4. Ensure effective communication and implementation of Board of Governors' decisions, particularly those impacting people, culture, and workforce strategies, enabling alignment and accountability across the University.
5. Maintain robust people governance frameworks that are fit for purpose, compliant, and aligned with sector best practice, ensuring clarity of roles, responsibilities, and decision-making.
6. Provide assurance to the Board and Executive that the University complies with all legislative and regulatory requirements relating to people, employment and equality, diversity and inclusion.
7. Ensure the University's policy framework for people and culture is current, comprehensive, and aligned with government policy and sector guidance.
8. Ensure the development and delivery of strategies for reward, resourcing, performance management, talent development, and employee engagement, which supports the University's ambitions to attract, retain, and motivate a high-performing workforce.
9. Provide strategic leadership and oversight to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are embedded across the University's culture, policies, and practices, driving initiatives that deliver belonging, representation, and equitable outcomes institution-wide.
10. Provides strategic oversight of employee health, safety, and wellbeing, ensuring alignment with organisational people priorities and strong collaboration across Equity & Inclusion, Wellbeing, Occupational Health, EAP, and Health & Safety functions.

Job Details - Principal Accountabilities

11. Ensure the provision and strategic application of people analytics and workforce insights to enable evidence-based decision-making and long-term workforce planning at an institutional level.
12. Drive people-related strategies that underpin financial sustainability, ensuring workforce planning and capability development align with long-term goals.
13. Represent and influence the people agenda externally, building strong relationships with national HE bodies (e.g., Office for Students, Universities HR, University Alliance) and key stakeholders to shape sector-wide policy and practice.
14. Ensure high performance and accountability across all people-related operations, fostering collaboration and alignment with the University's strategic framework and corporate objectives.
15. Advise the Governing Council on people-related matters, providing reports and assurance on performance against Institutional Success Measures and workforce indicators.
16. Monitor and respond to developments in people policy and practice, ensuring the University remains agile and compliant in a changing HE landscape.
17. Contribute flexibly to strategic change programmes and reviews, leading initiatives that strengthen the University's people capability and culture.
18. Represent the Vice-Chancellor at events as appropriate.

Job Details - Person Specification

Qualifications

- Degree-level education or equivalent experience.
- Postgraduate qualification in HR, Business, or a related field

Experience

- Proven track record of shaping and delivering people strategies at a senior leadership level within a complex organisation.
- Significant experience leading HR and People functions
- Experience of working with Boards and Executive teams to influence strategic decision-making.
- Experience of embedding equity, diversity and inclusion within organisational culture and policy.
- Strong background in governance and compliance, including employment law and regulatory frameworks.
- Experience of representing an organisation externally and influencing sector-wide policy.
- Proven ability to build constructive relationships with trade unions and staff representatives, leading negotiations and fostering collaborative solutions in a unionised environment.

Skills, knowledge & abilities

- Deep understanding of HR best practice, employment legislation, and equality, diversity, and inclusion principles.
- Deep expertise in employee relations, with a proven ability to navigate complex workforce issues in a highly regulated environment.
- Awareness of current and emerging trends in higher education and their impact on people strategy.
- Strategic thinker with the ability to translate vision into actionable plans.
- Exceptional leadership and people management skills, fostering collaboration and accountability.
- Strong influencing and relationship-building skills at all levels, internally and externally.
- Excellent communication skills, able to convey complex information clearly to diverse audiences.
- Analytical capability to interpret people data and provide actionable insights.
- Resilient and adaptable, able to lead through change and ambiguity.

Benefits

The University of Derby believes in providing choices to our people suited to their needs or life stages. Offering a number of salary sacrifice options, a generous holiday entitlement of 30 days plus bank holidays and 4 concessionary days and a host of family-friendly policies mean that splitting your time and finances can be easier. For those with prospective students in the household, we also offer tuition fee support to partners and children and, not forgetting you, we offer financial support for accredited learning.

Our competitive 'total reward' offer has something for everyone and looks to reward and recognise people in different ways.

Core to the package is a competitive pay structure and generous public-sector pension schemes. Our pay structure allows for stepped progression in role and is reviewed against the market and, where applicable, awarding national pay awards annually. Further financial support is offered through our generous pension contributions in support of your retirement fund with those within the Local Government Pension Scheme receiving an employer contribution of circa 23%.

Wellbeing at Derby features within our benefits options from our Employee Assistance Programme through to our eyecare voucher scheme, not to mention the discounted membership for our on-site gym at our Kedleston Road campus. With our Inclusion and Wellbeing Networks, there really is support for everyone.

We also facilitate 'Give as You Earn' options to donate to your preferred charities straight from your pay which enhances the amount your charity receives for your donation.

At the University of Derby, we celebrate loyalty and achievements through our Staff Excellence Framework be it financially, or non-financially. We aim to foster a culture of boldness and brilliance in our people, and from a simple thank you, through to a local awards ceremony, we recognise and celebrate notable achievements of our colleagues.

For more information on the benefits of working at the University of Derby go to the Benefit pages of our website: <https://www.derby.ac.uk/jobs/life-at-derby/rewards-and-benefits/>

Our People

The University of Derby is committed to promoting equity, diversity and inclusion, regardless of age, disability, trans status, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief (or none), sex and sexual orientation.

We are Disability Confident Employers, demonstrating our commitment to disability inclusion, and invite applicants to highlight adjustments they may require to ensure equitable participation in our recruitment processes.

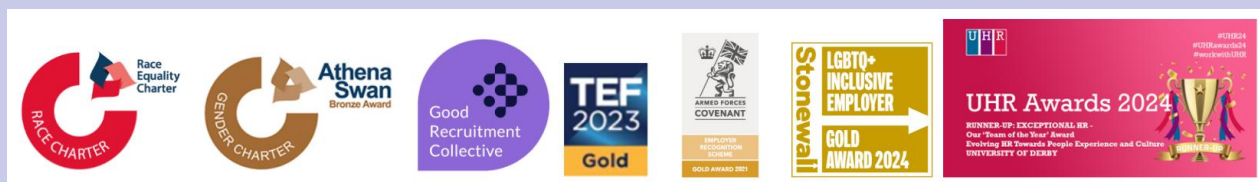
Further, we are committed to ensuring an environment which is trans and non-binary-inclusive for all our staff, students, partners, and visitors, and continuously review our policies, guidance and training.

When applying to join the University, you can choose your preferred title, including the gender-neutral title 'Mx'. We also ask our candidates if they would like to share their preferred pronouns. This is voluntary but demonstrates our commitment to inclusivity for trans and non-binary candidates. Once employed, you can add pronouns and preferred names onto our system.

The University of Derby undertakes anonymised shortlisting during the staff recruitment process. This means that, when shortlisting, panel members will not be able to see an applicant's name and will see an applicant number instead. This demonstrates the practical steps we are taking to remove barriers to recruitment by minimising the possible impact of our unconscious bias.

However you identify, we actively celebrate the knowledge, experience and talents each person brings. Our students come from a wide range of backgrounds; therefore, we are particularly interested to hear from applicants who will help our leaders and teams be more reflective of our student population.

For more information on equity, diversity and inclusion at the University of Derby, please visit our website: <https://www.derby.ac.uk/about/equality-and-diversity/>



Next steps

Applications should be made via email to alan@dixonwalter.co.uk and must include on separate documents:

- a letter of application setting out your interest in the role and details of how you match the person specification
- a comprehensive curriculum vitae (CV)
- details of three referees and notice period (referees will not be contacted without your permission)
- a completed Personal Details Form

Closing date for applications is **Sunday 1st March**

Longlist interviews will be held with Dixon Walter via Microsoft Teams from week commencing **2nd March**

Final interviews will take place on campus, the week commencing **30th March**

In making an application for this role we ask you also to view our Privacy Notice which outlines our compliance to General Data Protection Regulations and the use and storage of your data.

