

University Governance Search Services

Expert Search.
Extraordinary Care.

Governance search with
value, service and partnership.



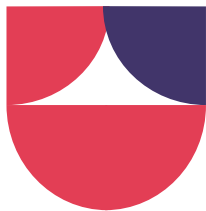
A new search firm
from a trusted name

University Leadership Associates (ULA) is the new higher education arm of FE Associates, a trusted name in executive and governance search and strategic consultancy for the Further Education sector since 2004.

Our deep roots in education give us unique insights into leadership through transformation, reform and strategic change.

We launched ULA to bring this depth of experience into the higher education sector, with a dedicated focus on Board, Chair, C-Suite, senior professional services and specialist academic appointments. Our team combines expert search experience with HE expertise, ensuring every appointment is high-quality, inclusive and strategically aligned.

Our
values
➔



Integrity

We deliver on our promises and we don't promise what we can't deliver.



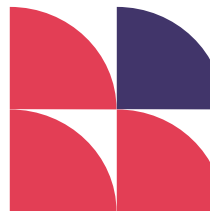
Diversity & Talent

We aim to attract and support the best diverse team of people.



Client Focus

We have a relentless client focus and the needs of our clients come first.



Excellence

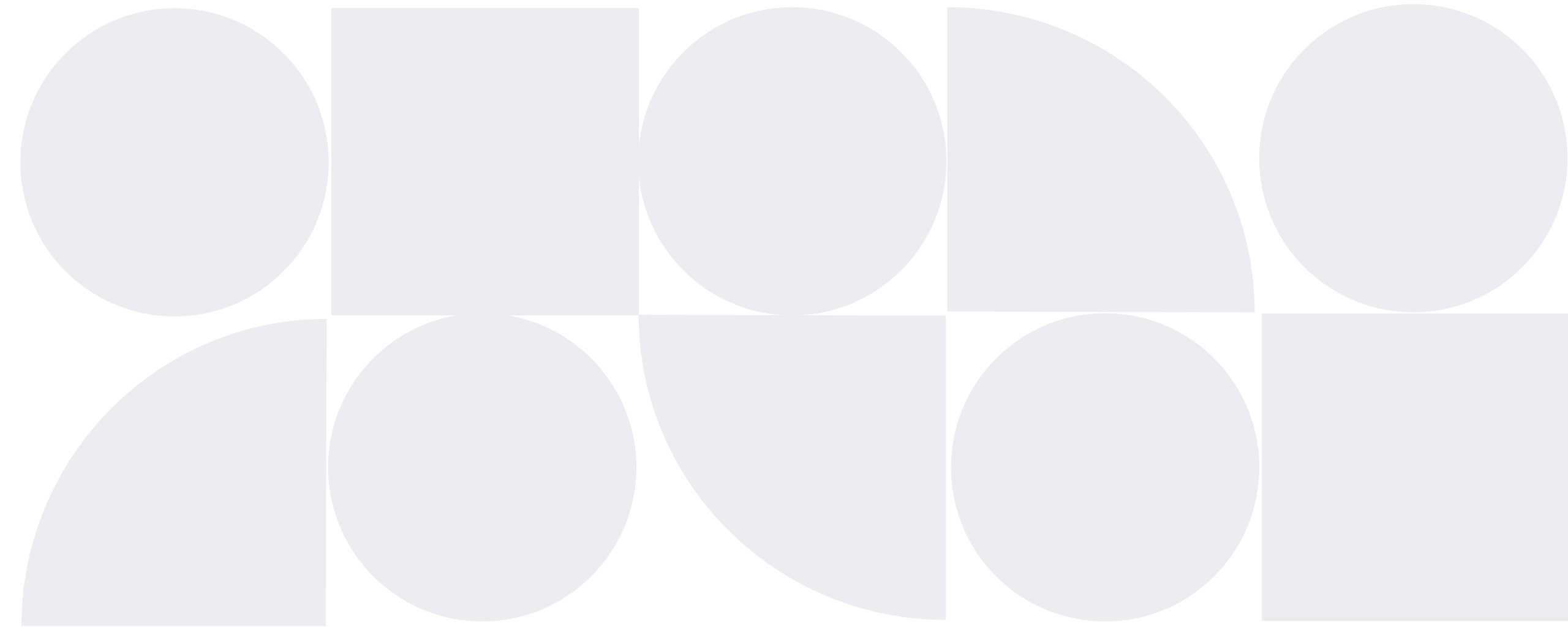
Whatever we do, we aim to do it best.

Governance and Board Appointments

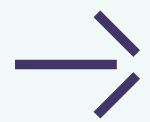


We specialise in high-quality, bespoke Board search that combines boutique-level care with pricing that reflects real value. Whether you are appointing Council Members, Committee Chairs, or refreshing your governance team, we offer a straightforward, effective search process to deliver diverse, capable and values-aligned individuals.

We are proud to work across all mission groups, and we bring a genuine appreciation for lived experience, civic purpose and inclusive leadership. Our networks span sectors and our candidate care is second to none.



Our Approach



01 →

Growing Our Networks

We're always building the talent pipeline for University boards. We don't wait for a brief to arrive. We're constantly engaging people across sectors who bring both the skills and the lived experience to make governance more effective.

02 →

Bespoke Search

Each governance search assignment is unique and despite our growing candidate networks, we never assume we know the right people for you at the outset. We recognise the importance of place, values and institutional journey. We listen carefully and work in partnership to match the right people to the right moment in your governance story.

03 →

Candidate Care

The level of support someone has before they join a Board is a key part of promoting a positive governance culture. For that reason, we are thoughtful about how we support and prepare candidates to help them understand both the opportunity and the responsibilities.

Strengthening and Supporting Governance

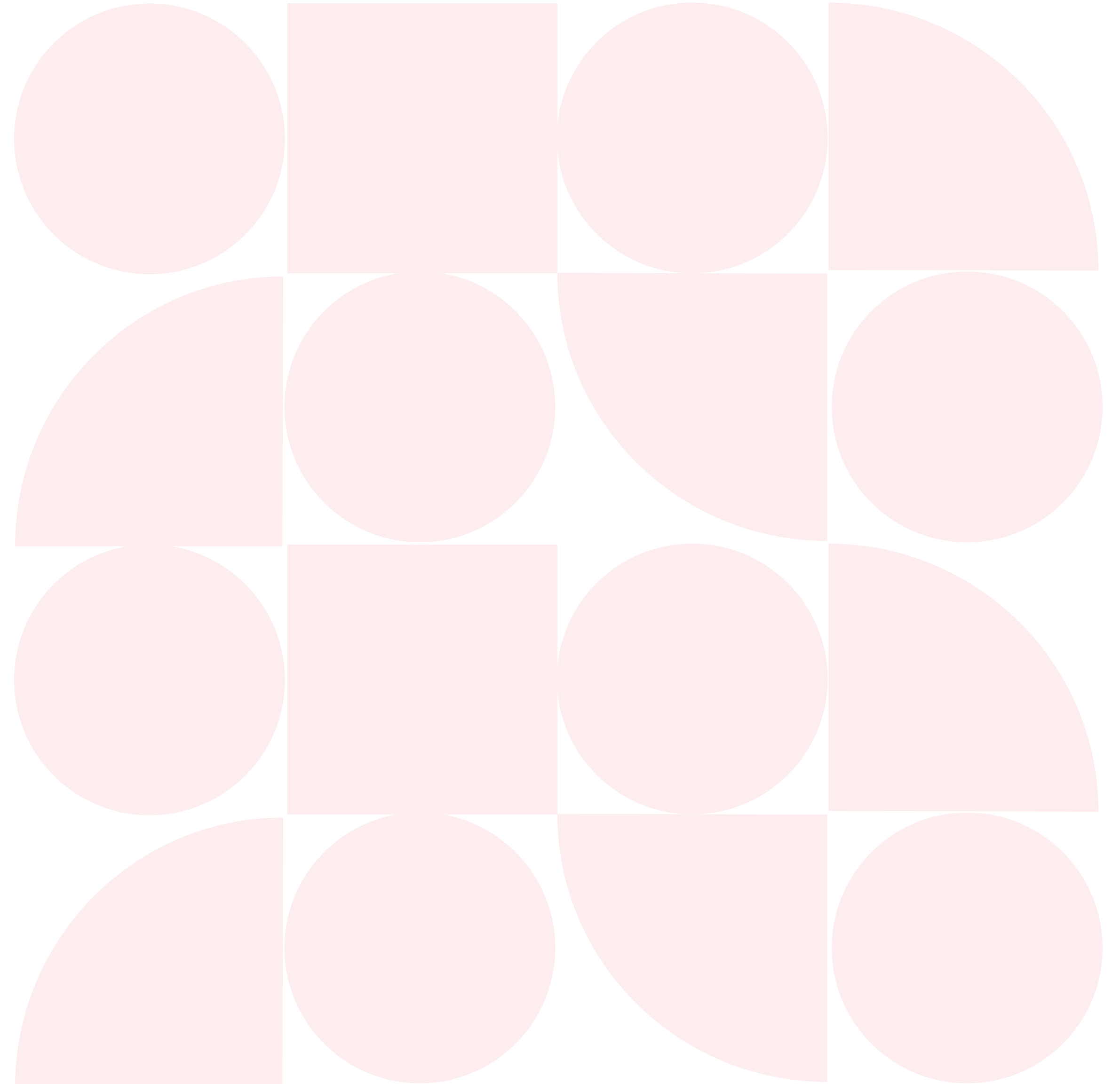


Higher Education governance is under unprecedented pressure and scrutiny and we are determined to support boards with expert search that attracts individuals who can bring their professional and personal perspectives that support effective governance. Our approach ensures that the candidates we attract not only bring technical expertise but also diverse viewpoints and an understanding of governance that delivers support, challenge and accountability.

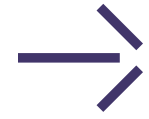
Our open, transparent and personalised approaches ensure that university boards can access candidates with a broad range of perspectives who bring experiences that add real value to institutional governance and strategy oversight.

By building trusting relationships with our candidate base we are able to prioritise candidates who are active participants in university governance. We go beyond transactional approaches by ensuring we find our clients non-executive leaders who are able to contribute to higher education providers maintaining the trust and confidence of stakeholders whilst ensuring the complex accountability relationships which are a feature of today's higher education system are navigated successfully.

We specialise in high-quality, bespoke Board search that combines boutique-level care with pricing that reflects real value.



Why Choose University Leadership Associates for Board Search?



We have the support and infrastructure of a specialist education sector search firm with an excellent track record in making non-executive appointments.

We are committed to providing excellent value through highly competitive pricing and excellent service.

We build a deep understanding of your organisational and governance priorities at the outset of each search.

We promote and protect your brand and reputation by providing first-class levels of care.

Our expertise in governance and Board appointments to education institutions is unmatched, offering universities a trusted partner for securing high-calibre governors who bring strategic vision and robust oversight to their institutions.

Our deep understanding of all parts of the education sector set us apart and our parent company and consultant team have successfully placed non-executive leaders who have made significant contributions to the boards they have joined.

Unlike other providers, our focus is solely on education, ensuring that every search campaign is tailored to the unique needs and culture of each client organisation.

We pride ourselves on our rigorous approach to understanding your organisation and Board and we have an unwavering dedication to long-term success for both our clients and candidates.

We also believe in providing the best possible value for money to our clients. We do not believe that the costs of governance search should be prohibitive and our belief in supporting institutions to recruit what are mainly volunteer governors and non-executives guides our pricing policies.

We are very mindful that every time we approach a potential candidate, we have your reputation in our hands and we guard this by ensuring that your reputation is enhanced by the partnership we form with you.

Our Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion



We believe in equity, not just equality, and in genuine care, not just compliance.

The case for diversity on University boards is not just moral, it is strategic. Governing bodies that reflect the communities they serve are better equipped to make inclusive, informed decisions and to model the values of their institutions. We are conscious that progress around this is being made but not moving as quickly as ideal.

According to Advance HE's 2024 report:

43.4%

of university governors are women.

15.2%

of UK governors are from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds.

6.5%

have disclosed a disability.

A small number of individuals represent multiple protected characteristics.

This highlights the need for continued, intentional action. Diversity is not just about who is present, of course. It's also about who feels able to contribute, challenge and lead.

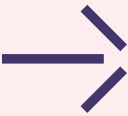
We are proud to be:

- **An Affiliated Organisation with the Black Leadership Group**, working toward anti-racist practices across FE and HE.
- **In close partnership with Board Racial Diversity UK**, with access to their database of candidates from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse backgrounds.
- **Constantly engaging with emerging research**, for example, Darren Franklin's current work on Identity and Ethnic Minority Representation on UK Charity Boards.
- **Committed to intersectional inclusion, including age, disability, neurodiversity, and socioeconomic background** because, as Inclusive Employers and CIPD have highlighted, individuals are not one-dimensional.

Working in search, it is our responsibility to champion talented people from underrepresented groups. But it is also our responsibility to understand the scale of what is sometimes asked of an individual. We promise to run processes that are inclusive, human-centred and designed to build people up, not knock them down. We want every candidate to feel seen, supported and confident, whether they are appointed or not.

Our commitment means that we will support you to define and articulate your diversity and inclusion priorities for institutional governance and we will shape our bespoke candidate attraction approach to match your requirements.

Our People



Elle Hurst
Senior Consultant

“ Elle’s professionalism, strategic acumen, and commitment to delivering outstanding results make her a key player in higher education leadership appointments. ”

Professor Ehsan Mesbahi
Academic Provost
University of Southampton Malaysia

“ Elle’s passion and commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion is engaging and infectious. I recommend her to any organisation for her expertise, energy, and enthusiasm. ”

Malcolm John
Founder
Board Diversity UK

Elle leads governance searches for ULA. Prior to joining ULA she specialised in searches needing a high level of skilled search, candidate care and relationship building at Gatenby Sanderson. She has also worked as an in-house executive search lead for senior appointments in Canterbury Christ Church University and before that, Head of Research and Associate Consultant at Minerva, specialising in Higher Education appointments.

Elle has an MA in English Literature from the University of Edinburgh as well as an MSc in Psychology and MA in Education from Canterbury Christ Church University. As the first in her family to go to University, she is passionate about the potential for higher education to transform lives.



Jo Johnston
Managing Director, ULA

“ Jo really did feel like a member of our team by the end, and fellow governors highly regarded her work. ”

Ian Sackree
Chair of Governors
Bishop Burton College

“ Jo’s professionalism and flexibility in understanding our needs while managing a smooth and thorough process ensured the board were fully reassured in their decision making of such a critical appointment. ”

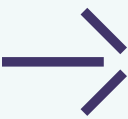
Max Hailey
Chair of Governors
Buckinghamshire College Group

ULA Managing Director, Jo Johnston, has extensive leadership of search and recruitment across education and the private sector. Jo heads up all of ULA’s and parent company FEA’s leadership and governance recruitment activity. Prior to joining FEA, Jo was Managing Director of Commercial Services for an education sector membership body, AOC Create.

Jo’s role in the search for new Council members is to work closely with your lead consultant to ensure effective project set up, delivery and exceptional client liaison.

Jo has supported a number of institutions with board appointments and has a deep understanding of how to attract and secure strong and diverse candidate fields. She is highly focused on ensuring ULA represents each client with absolute professionalism and that we provide exceptionally high levels of support to clients and candidates.

Our Strategic Advisors



Alongside our core team, we benefit from the strategic insight of our strategic advisors, Dame Sally Dicketts DBE and Dr Trevor Bolton.



Dame Sally Dicketts DBE

A passionate educationalist, Dame Sally currently sits on the Boards of the University of Bradford and Royal Holloway University. As the former CEO of Activate Learning, she grew one of the largest education groups in the country and led successful collaborations with several university partners including Royal Holloway, Middlesex and Oxford Brooks.

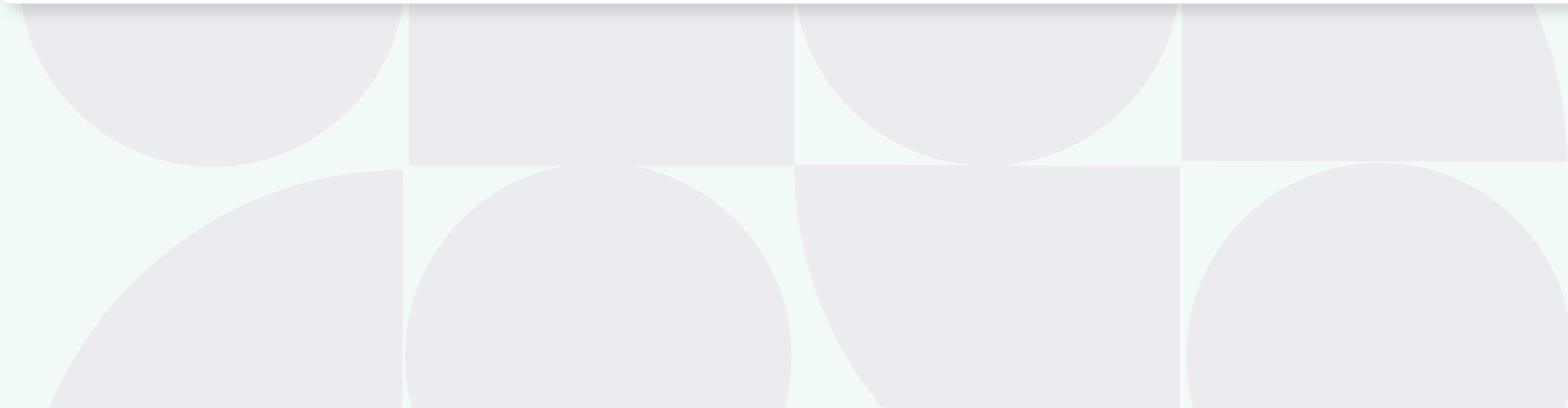
Sally has chaired and been a member of local, regional and national boards in both public and commercial sectors and works with a range of organisations on culture change.



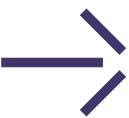
Dr Trevor Bolton

Since stepping down as Pro Vice-Chancellor at Anglia Ruskin University in 2019, Dr Trevor Bolton has built a portfolio that includes advising universities and colleges in the UK and overseas.

Trevor currently sits on the Boards of Sheffield Hallam University, The Architectural Association, The School of Architecture and Chelmsford College where he is vice chair.



Get in touch



Ready to strengthen your governance by appointing exceptional Board or Council members? Let University Leadership Associates demonstrate our approach rooted in value, service and partnership.

Jo Johnston
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Elle Hurst
Senior Consultant
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