

DEMOS

CHAIR

BRIEF FOR APPLICANTS

JANUARY 2026



WELCOME

Dear Applicant,

Thank you for your interest in becoming our next Chair of the Board at Demos.

Demos is the UK's leading cross-party think tank, founded in 1993, its mission is to upgrade democracy with a new deal between state and citizen that shares power differently. We are at an exciting moment for our organisation with a strong team led by our fantastic CEO Polly Curtis and new financial strength powering innovative work to improve the practice of everyday democracy, reform public services and reshape the economy and technology for citizens.

The organisation has renewed and strengthened over the past four years to rise to the challenge of the democratic moment we're in: a moment of growing democratic emergency in which our traditions and institutions are threatened by a dangerous loss of public confidence, fuelled by global trends and recent events.

Our mission, to upgrade democracy, is focusing on how to repair the broken relationships between state and citizens - and between citizens - to build back trust and renew democracy. We do this by designing new ways to involve people in policy making, reforms to public services that build a more relational state, and proposals to rebalance the economy for a new settlement between state, citizen and private sector. Our work on information environments, and how you shape technology to strengthen rather than weaken democracy, is first in class.

In the week that I am writing, the team is piloting new digital deliberative tools with councils, working with MPs to convene trust-building forums and with parliament on new participatory approaches to detoxify the immigration debate, launching research exposing the future threats of AI to national security and policy on how to secure the BBC's independent future. We are working regularly with the government and convening cross-party approaches to sustainable long-term reform. Our mission - to upgrade democracy - is big and ambitious; our methods are practical, bold and hopeful.

The Demos Board is highly committed, driven to ensure the organisation can meet the challenges of our times, and works with an open, collaborative style. We've always valued the different skills and perspectives brought by each Board member and continue to see our different backgrounds as a rich asset. As Dame Julie Mellor concludes her final term as our Chair later this year, we are looking for an exceptional strategic leader to succeed her. You could come from any sector but, wherever you have worked, you will offer an established reputation and network along with an outstanding record of achievement.

We are looking for someone with a genuine personal interest in Demos and what we do, and a big vision for what may be possible. You will help us navigate the new terrain of the democracy emergency. A formidable advocate for democracy, committed to the cross-party approach, but with the political insight to understand how to influence at the highest level, you will bring your strategic reach, personal influence and sophisticated interpersonal skills to a close-knit team. We are looking for an experienced organisational board member or chair who has the skills, techniques and intuition to support and guide this superb team.

If you are inspired by our mission and want to be part of our journey, we would love to hear from you.

Dr Mohammed Aziz
Chair of the Selection Panel

ABOUT DEMOS

Our why?

We are in a **democratic emergency**, fuelled by the breakdown of relationships – those between state and citizen, between institutions and citizens and between citizens themselves.

The UK faces a “democratic doom loop” of mistrust, disengagement and political ineffectiveness, inhibiting government’s ability to deliver on its democratic promises, which in turn further damages trust in institutions. But we believe that with innovation, inclusive engagement, bold ideas and bravery, this country can reverse democratic decline.

Our what

Our mission is to **upgrade democracy**. We see a radically upgraded, stronger democratic system, sustained for the future, powered by trusting relationships, civic and democratic participation, information and technology.

We are working to develop **a new deal** to repair the broken systems that are undermining democracy. The new deal asks something of us all, delivers for all citizens and is built through collaboration.

The new deal restores trust by improving everyday life for all citizens. As trust grows, people re-engage in democracy, enabling government to become more resilient and innovative. Working collaboratively, government creates fresh solutions and ensures all key players influencing society and the economy contribute responsibly. This is the democratic hope loop.

Our how?

Our ambition is big, our approach is practical: To upgrade democracy, we need to design the **practical elements** of the new deal plotting out tangible actions that can start to reverse the doom loop.

Our work – designing the big ideas, building the case for them and influencing the system to adopt them – focuses on:

- **Everyday Democracy**, through participation, more resilient information environments, stronger communities and by tackling polarisation
- **Public Service Reform** to deliver for people in a more relational, preventative and effective way
- **Citizen Economy** to create a fairer deal for citizens
- **Trustworthy Technology** will ensure tech is in service of the new deal, rather than exacerbating the crisis

The new deal will deliver on our charitable objectives to promote education for the public benefit in issues of politics, economics, technology and practices of public deliberation and create a more inclusive, sustainable and effective experience for the demos.

To find out more about Demos, please visit <https://demos.co.uk/>

OUR CURRENT BOARD



Dame Julie Mellor DBE

Chair of Trustees

[Find out more](#)



Mohammed Aziz

Trustee

[Find out more](#)



Halima Begum

Trustee

[Find out more](#)



Alex Dawson

Trustee

[Find out more](#)



Dame Sara Khan DBE

Trustee

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Will Moy

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James Plunkett

Trustee

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Campbell Robb

Trustee

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Alex White

Trustee

[Find out more](#)

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE ROLE

Trustees are collectively responsible for:

- Upholding and adhering to the highest standards of governance
- Ensuring we meet our fiduciary and wider legal responsibilities
- Providing leadership, contributing to our strategic direction and how we can most effectively deliver
- Scrutinising performance and holding the executive team to account for delivery against strategic objectives, and
- Being an ambassador for Demos and supporting the executive team in fundraising.

The Chair provides strategic leadership to the Board of Trustees at Demos, working with and guiding the Chief Executive, collectively ensuring the delivery of the organisation's vision, mission and charitable objects.

Main responsibilities of the Chair role

- Lead the Board to set the vision and strategic direction for an influential national organisation.
- Manage a diverse Board and continue developing the Board's culture, knowledge and capability, ensuring its ongoing development.
- Promote and keep under review the highest standards of governance, performance and propriety.
- Set the Board's risk appetite and ensure that major risks and opportunities are regularly reviewed and addressed.
- Ensure compliance with all statutory requirements and guidance.
- Line manage the Chief Executive, ensuring they are supported, continue to develop in the role and are held to account for achieving agreed strategic objectives.
- Provide a sounding board for the Chief Executive regularly, encouraging reflection on complex and demanding issues and offering counsel to support decision making.
- Chair meetings of the Board of Trustees to ensure high-quality, inclusive debate and well-informed, timely decision-making, in the best interests of the organisation.
- Work with the Executive to create a positive organisational culture, role modelling and holding other board members to account for behaviours that underpin our mission and values.
- Ensure Trustees are engaged and contribute well.
- Foster a high value and productive relationship with, and between, Trustees and between Trustees and Executive.
- Represent Demos externally as required.

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR

Your knowledge and experience

- You will bring very substantial senior strategic experience; this will be reflected in an outstanding personal record of achievement.
- You will offer a clear understanding of the role of Chair in delivering effective strategic leadership and leading and developing a strong and cohesive Board.
- We are ideally looking for an experienced organisational Chair with a well-developed appreciation of governance, including statutory and charity regulations, but will consider outstanding experienced board members looking for their first chair role.
- You will have significant experience of influencing stakeholders – eg politicians, business leaders, trade unions, civil society, opinion formers and journalists – and a reputation for astute political judgement.
- You will have a strong interest in democracy and participation, political, economic and social affairs and current affairs more broadly.
- You will bring excellent experience of working with executive teams to help set strategic direction and support delivery.
- Experience of fundraising or business development would be an asset.

Your skills, abilities and leadership style

- We are looking for a values-led, visionary Chair, driven by a deep commitment to our mission.
- Your personal networks offer scope for relationships that assist our research and influencing activity, introduce potential partners for projects, or donors and supporters who can fund our work.
- Strong Board leadership skills, including the ability to facilitate discussion and debate, and drive good decision-making.
- You are someone who inspires trust and confidence, is evidence-led, brings maturity of judgement to problem-solving, and is personally influential.
- You bring high analytical and intellectual capacity and are financially and commercially astute.
- Low-ego in leadership presence, you are personally flexible and use a coaching and mentoring style in your interactions with the Executive.
- You are a true team player with a supportive style, who is recognised for their wisdom, perspective and integrity.

TERMS OF APPOINTMENT

Time commitment

This role requires 1-2 days per month, including:

- Attendance at four to six Board meetings a year, currently lasting on average of around three hours per meeting
- Attendance at an annual away day to focus on the Board's effectiveness and future strategy
- Regular informal/ad hoc discussions and interaction with the CEO.

We are looking for an available and engaged Chair who is genuinely committed to our mission and prepared to take calls as needed.

All trustees, including our Chair, are asked to share their networks willingly in order to assist with research, influencing and fundraising activities.

Remuneration

All trustee roles, including our Chair, are voluntary with reasonable expenses incurred in fulfilling your duties fully reimbursed.

Conflict of interest

All Trustees – especially the Chair – should avoid any conflict between their personal interests and those of the charity.

We therefore ask all candidates to declare any known interests where these may ultimately present conflicts. These may be material conflicts of interest, give rise to a perception of conflict, or present 'optics' considerations.

Appointment length

The term of appointment is three years, potentially renewable for a further three years.

HOW TO APPLY FOR THIS ROLE

We hope you will consider making an application to become the next Chair of Demos. To apply, please visit the **Starfish Search website** with the following prepared:

- A CV or equivalent biographical information (no more than three sides);
- A short covering letter that explains your motivation and suitability and confirms that you would not be subject to any conflict of interest or eligibility breach;
- Please tell us if there are any dates during the selection process (outlined below) when you would not be available to participate.

The closing date is: **Friday 20th March 2026**

Selection process

Advertised closing date

Friday 20th March 2026

Preliminary interviews

Late March and early April 2026

Agreement of the final shortlist

Candidates will hear towards the end of April 2026

Informal meetings

Late April 2026

Final interview

Likely to be in w/c 4th May

Forward meeting dates

- Tuesday 15th September 2026, 3 - 6pm
- Tuesday 8th December 2026, 3 - 6pm

DEMOS