

# The International Centre for Life

## Candidate Pack for the Chair

January 2026



# Welcome

Thank you for your interest in joining us as the next Chair with The International Centre for Life.

Life is a very unusual and special place. A science village that brings together clinics, cutting edge medical research and, at the heart of it all, a science centre that engages over a quarter of a million people every year in the wonders and relevance of science. You can read more about what we do, and the business model that supports our work, later in this document.

As our current Chair, Fiona Cruickshank, steps down later this year having successfully led our Board with insight, enthusiasm and dedication for over five years, we are looking for our next Chair to build on her legacy as we look to the future. We are looking for a commercially astute, entrepreneurial and strategic leader with considerable experience of operating in similarly complex organisations that have undergone change and transformation.

With excellent communication and influencing skills, you will be adept at establishing and maintaining strong relationships with our key partners, have a demonstrable interest and enthusiasm for science and technology, and an affinity with the North East and understand the important role that Life plays with our communities.

The world is shaped increasingly by developments in science and technology, and the rapid pace of change adds to the opportunities and challenges this affords. So, Life's purpose has never been more relevant. Despite the challenges, Life is in a strong position, and we are looking for someone who is ready to take Life on the next stage of its journey.

If you would like to be part of this innovative and exciting organisation and work with a passionate and committed team, read on to find out what it means to be Chair.

**Linda Conlon**  
**Chief Executive, MBE, DL**



# Who we are

*“Life is a jewel in the region’s crown – a place that fosters creativity, increases scientific literacy and inspires future scientists.”*

Professor Peter Higgs, Nobel Prize-winning particle physicist

The International Centre for Life, or Life as we are known, is an iconic, vibrant science village that has become an integral and much-loved part of the fabric of the city. Every year, around half a million people access the services and activities offered on site.

It is an exciting, imaginative and eclectic mix: from NHS clinics to an award-winning science centre, and from cutting-edge medical research to a vibrant programme of events in its outdoor space, Times Square. Life has impacted the lives of many and is a source of great regional pride. Thousands of people, from local families, schools and business people to Prime Ministers, Nobel Prize-winning scientists and astronauts, are passionate ambassadors for this unique site.

Life is built on a robust business model. Most of our commercial income is derived from property rental and this comes principally from Newcastle University as well as the NHS and entertainment venues on site. Income also comes from the nearby car park, and events held in Times Square, including an outdoor ice rink. Two cafes and a shop are also part of the mix. The profits from these activities are passed from the Commercial Company to the Trust in the form of gift aid, on an annual basis.

At the heart of the site is the educational visitor attraction, Life Science Centre, the region’s only contemporary science centre. We have a unique approach to engaging audiences with science, offering family-friendly hands-on exhibits, inspiring live shows and the region’s most advanced planetarium, as well as curriculum-linked schools’ workshops and special events for adults and pre-schoolers. Our specialisms include space, climate and early years engagement.

We work with urban and rural schools, all shapes and sizes of family, and underserved communities, reaching many young people who never would have considered a job in STEM as ‘for them’, and igniting the vital spark that raises aspirations and ambitions and showcases the breadth of jobs available.

The setting of the science centre, within a working science village, also provides access to inspirational role models for the next generation of STEM professionals.

To find out more, read the Evolving Story of Life digital document, produced to mark our 25th anniversary, or watch this video by clicking on the [LINK](#)

Information about the International Centre for Life Trust, including annual reports and accounts, can be found on the websites of the Charity Commission and Companies House.

*“Visitors to Life have a truly wonderful resource that will help to create a brighter future for everyone and enable us all to really enjoy being part of this vast and beautiful universe.”*

Helen Sharman, Britain’s first astronaut

# Purpose and Values

**Life's purpose is to inspire everyone to explore and enjoy science, and to provide a world-class science hub where life enhancing engagement, research and patient treatment can thrive**

Life aspires to be one of the most accessible and inclusive visitor attractions in the UK and has earned an international reputation for its innovative work in creating an environment where every visitor feels welcomed, respected and valued. It's a mindset that is embedded in the culture of Life and every team member lives and breathes this philosophy.

Science engagement is our product and 'science for all' is our mantra. We believe that every person deserves to

- Benefit from the exploration and enjoyment of science
- Understand the relevance of science to their own lives
- See the career opportunities that STEM affords.

## Our values

- **We champion science**
- **We make it happen**
- **We celebrate diversity**
- **We are independent and entrepreneurial**
- **We are commercially astute**

*"Life provides huge amounts of pleasure, education and inspiration, especially for young people."*

Bill Bryson, author and former Chancellor, Durham University

## Some Facts of Life

- 250,000 people visit Life Science Centre every year
- Nearly 40 major exhibitions have been hosted at Life including Body Worlds and Game On 2.0
- 50,000 educational experiences are delivered to schools every year
- 560,000 people each year access the services and facilities at Life
- Over 120 events have taken place in Times Square since 2000, with an average of 4,500 attendees each year
- Life has received nearly 30 regional, national and international awards. See here for the full list <https://www.life.org.uk/who-we-are/awards-wins/>
- Over 6000 babies have been born as a result of fertility treatment received at Life
- Life was the first science centre in the world to be repurposed as a NHS Covid-19 Large Vaccination Centre
- In 2003, human embryonic stem cells were produced for the first time in the UK at Life
- In 2009, human sperm was created from embryonic stem cells at Life- a world first
- In 2010, researchers at Life announced a new treatment to help women with mitochondrial diseases have children without passing on the debilitating disease. In 2023, the first baby was born using donor mitochondria
- In July 2025, it was announced that 8 babies, all at risk of mitochondrial disease, had been born and shown no signs of the disease

# How we are governed

Life is governed by a Board of Trustees, drawing on the experience and expertise of senior figures from different industries. Together they ensure that Life fulfils its purpose, and continues to respond to the needs of the region. With backgrounds including pharmaceuticals, start-ups, education and politics, they ensure that Life inspires many different audiences, and explores fresh ideas from different perspectives.

Life's Commercial Company is a subsidiary of the Trust and is charged with overseeing Life's commercial activities, to ensure that they generate the maximum income to enable the Trust to carry out its charitable objectives.



# Our current board of Trustees



## **Fiona Cruickshank OBE, Chair of the Board**

Fiona, a North East native, is an experienced entrepreneur with an interest in helping small and medium-sized businesses reach their growth potential. She supports a range of businesses as an Angel investor. Fiona joined the Board at Life in 2013, becoming Chair in 2020, and is committed in supporting our mission to make science accessible for all and making a difference to the region.



## **Jane Robinson, Pro-Vice-Chancellor - Engagement and Place, Newcastle University**

As Newcastle University's first Pro-Vice Chancellor, Jane has a wealth of experience and knowledge of how both local and national partnerships can tackle social and economic challenges. Previously, Jane was Durham University's Chief Operating Officer with strategic oversight of operations and external engagement. Before taking up her position at Durham, Jane was Chief Executive of Gateshead Council. Jane also played a leading role in the establishment of the North East Combined Authority and the Commission on Health and Social Care Integration.



## **Dr. Laura Strain, Executive Director, Virgo Health**

With more than 15 years of experience in scientific communications, Laura is part of the leadership team at Virgo Health, a global agency which specialises in communications and education in the healthcare sector. Laura was inspired to go into a career in genetics following a visit to Life. She completed her undergraduate degree in Genetics – which included student placements at Life – and PhD in the Genetic and Determinants of Type 2 Diabetes at Newcastle University, before moving to London to pursue a career in scientific communication. After 12 years working in London, Laura returned with her family to her native North East roots.



## **Lucy Winskill, OBE, Lord Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear, and Chair of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership**

Lucy is a champion for the North East at a national level and throughout her career has highlighted the importance of the arts, culture and creative sectors. A lawyer by background, she was Pro Vice-Chancellor at Northumbria University for 12 years until 2022 when she was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear; the monarch's representative. During her time at Northumbria, Lucy was one of the main driving forces behind the university launching a campus in Amsterdam, overseeing the growth of the campus in London and substantially improving graduate employability. Lucy is also the chair of the North East Local Enterprise Partnership and until 2020, was the chair of the North East England Chamber of Commerce.

# Our current board of Trustees



## **John Downes, North East Area Director and Head of Youth, Street Games**

John is passionate about working with children and young people to improve their lives through new experiences and developing their skill sets. This is visible in his current role at StreetGames, one of the UK's leading 'sport for development' charities which organises a number of annual campaigns for disadvantaged children and families.



## **Tracey Stonehouse, Director of Finance, Procurement and Compliance, CPI.**

Tracey started her career as a graduate with Northumbrian Water. She has gone on to hold senior positions in several large organisations and has been involved in successful business sustainability and re-engineering exercises. Tracey has a passion for building client relationships and keen to support people in reaching their full potential.



## **Mathen Ganesan, Executive Vice President of Intellectual Ventures' (IV) Invention Investment Fund**

Born and raised in Newcastle, Mathen Ganesan studied his Undergraduate degree in Newcastle, before moving to London for his Masters. Mathen has 20+ years' experience in starting, building and investing in advanced technology companies. He is currently the Executive Vice President of Intellectual Ventures' (IV) Invention Investment Fund. In this role, he spent three years in Dublin before moving with his family to Seattle, in the States, where he served on the Board of Directors at the Pacific Science Centre for four years.



## **Mark Ryan, Chief Product Officer, Pavlov**

Mark is a Co-Founder of Trig who help businesses turn everyday user behavior into revenue opportunities for B2B SaaS companies.



## **Andrew Herridge, Medical Laboratory Scientist, Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Labour Councillor**

As well as working for the NHS, Andrew represents the Castle ward of the city for Newcastle City Council. Andrew is a north east native with a keen interest in STEM. During his early career, he was based on the Life site, which sparked his interest in the wider activities of the Centre for Life.

# Our Non-Executive Directors



## **Fiona Cruickshank OBE, Chair of the Board**

Fiona, a North East native, is an experienced entrepreneur with an interest in helping small and medium-sized businesses reach their growth potential. She supports a range of businesses as an Angel investor. Fiona joined the Board at Life in 2013, becoming Chair in 2020, and is committed in supporting our mission to make science accessible for all and making a difference to the region.



## **John Seager, Director, Broadoak Asset Management**

John is a director of Newcastle-based consultants Broadoak Asset Management. Having qualified as a chartered surveyor in 1998 he has worked with the private sector, development agencies and local authorities as well as institutional investors. He has been involved in some of the North East region's most ambitious and successful developments and regeneration projects, from Team Valley Trading Estate, the former Vaux Brewery site in Sunderland, to Newcastle's Grainger Market and the Helix Innovation District amongst a long and varied list. John is also a non-executive director of Gateshead Fell Community Football Club and Boho Arts.



## **David Griffiths, Director, GPLI Ltd**

David has been a chartered surveyor for more than two decades, and since 2009 has been a director of GPLI, a property consultancy advising landlords and tenants across a variety of sectors, from retail, leisure and entertainment to education and health. David is a passionate advocate for the North East and has acted for international clients resulting in £300m of inward property investment to the region. The former Royal Navy pilot, studied at Northumbria University, completing a Masters in Project Management and also served as a governor at West Jesmond Primary School.

# Job description

## Job title: Chair of the Board of Trustees

The overall responsibility of the Board of Trustees is to safeguard the charity's future, ensure it is well governed and achieves its charitable objectives.

The role of Chair is integral to this. The Chair oversees the Board which takes important decisions on Life's strategic direction, including approval of plans and budgets devised by the Executive Team.

The Chair also sits as a member of the subsidiary board.

## Responsibilities of the Chair include

### Leadership

- Leading the Board and ensuring that Life is governed effectively, in line with our purpose, legal obligations, and best practices
- Providing leadership to the Board in fulfilling its role of setting strategic direction and ensuring that public benefit remains central
- Supporting an honest and transparent culture aligned with Life's values
- Acting with integrity, not allowing personal views, prejudices or wider interests to impact conduct
- Set Board agendas in partnership with the CEO
- Chair meetings effectively to encourage participation, focus, and good decision-making
- Ensure actions and decisions are followed up appropriately

### Governance and assurance

- Ensuring compliance with all legal and regulatory requirements; taking external advice where appropriate. Areas of particular importance are financial statements, governance, health and safety, cyber security, employment, equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion and risk management
- Being responsible for overall performance and ensuring that there are appropriate financial controls, accounting systems and insurances in place to protect our resources (in particular our finances and property portfolio) and prevent any abuse or loss of funds and assets

### Supporting the CEO and developing the Board

- The Chair fosters a positive, supportive relationship with the CEO and Executive, acting as a trusted sounding Board and critical friend. The Chair ensures an appropriate balance of support and constructive challenge towards the achievement of Life's strategic priorities
- Support, guide, and appraise the CEO's performance and assist with succession planning
- Be available for advice or discussion between board meetings
- Ensure the board has the right mix of skills and diversity
- Support in the recruitment, induction, and ongoing development of Trustees
- Promote an inclusive and effective team dynamic within the board
- The Chair acts as an ambassador as required, representing the charity at events and meetings where appropriate

# Person specification

## Knowledge and experience

A background in one or more of the following is essential:

- Strong commercial acumen and senior, strategic leadership skills and business experience gained in organisations of comparable complexity and scale
- Experience of leading organisations through significant change and transformation
- Strong understanding of the North East of England and capable of building and sustaining key relationships and representing Life's internal and external stakeholders including customers, key partners within academia, businesses, charities and the local community
- Financial expertise and experience of different business models and commercial income generation, development of funding relationships and partnerships with a wide variety of funders

## Skills and behaviours

- Highly effective Board leadership and communication skills with the ability to influence and motivate and engage
- Politically, analytically and commercially sharp; sound independent judgement.
- Personally flexible and available to carry out the role; demonstrates commitment, high ethical standards and integrity in all personal and business dealings.
- An interest in, or affinity with, the North East.
- Deep commitment to the values and mission of Life and an interest in science



# Terms of appointment

## Remuneration

This is a voluntary position, with reasonable expenses paid.

## Location

Life Science Centre, Times Square, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4EP

## Time commitment

This appointment requires around 1-2 days a month.

The Full board meets four times a year with the Full Trust meetings happening in person of which two meetings in January take place online.

## Term of appointment

The Chair is appointed, as per other trustees, for 3 years with an option to extend for a further three year period. We are ideally looking for someone who can commit for at least 6 years.

## Full Trust programme of meetings for 2026

Monday, 20 July at 3pm – 5pm

Tuesday, 24 November at 1pm – 3pm

## Property Company programme of meetings for 2026

Friday, 17 July at 12pm – 2pm

Monday, 23 November at 12pm – 2pm

We are looking to bring the Trust and Property boards together for an Away Day (starting at 12.30pm) in late April.

# How to apply

We hope you will consider making an application. If you have questions about the appointment and would find it helpful to have an informal conversation, please contact Rebecca O'Connor at [rebecca.oconnor@starfishsearch.com](mailto:rebecca.oconnor@starfishsearch.com) and we will be happy to arrange a call.

To make an application, please visit the [Starfish website here](#) and click on the apply now button, with the following prepared:

- Your CV (no more than three sides).
- A supporting statement (no more than two sides) that sets out why you think this role is the right move for you and how you meet the knowledge and experience criteria.

We would also be grateful if you would complete the Equality and Diversity monitoring form on the online application process. This form is for monitoring purposes only and is not treated as part of your application.

**Closing date:** Friday 13th March 2026

**Preliminary interviews:** w/c 23rd March 2026

**Final Panel interviews:** w/c 13th April 2026