

National Operations Director Recruitment pack



About us

Shannon Trust is a charity that transforms lives by supporting people to learn to read and improve other basic skills. We believe nobody should be left out of learning. We operate in all prisons across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We also work with a number of partner organisations in the community, supporting their service users to learn to read.

Over 50% of people in prison, and 16% in the community, have a literacy level below that of an 11 year old. Many cannot read at all. This means they have reduced access to education, training and rehabilitation programmes which could transform their lives, and give them hope for a better future outside of the criminal justice system

Many of our employees work remotely, with colleagues currently based in all parts of the country, from the North East to the South West and all points in between. We've always supported home working, so you can be assured we know how to make you feel welcome and part of the team. We also have prison-based colleagues who do a fantastic job of growing our programmes in their prisons. We arrange regular in person meetings as well, to help everyone keep in touch.

Our family friendly employee benefits includes flexible working, a generous holiday allowance, Employee Assistance Programme and employee discount scheme.

"I didn't think that at the age of 72 it was going to be worthwhile. I have now been reading for 2 years and enjoying it."

Shannon Trust learner



Our purpose, vision, mission and values

Purpose

We support people in the criminal justice system to learn to read, and improve other basic skills so they can pursue wider opportunities and thrive in the community

Vision

A future where everyone can experience the positive impact of learning

Mission

To connect the power of volunteers, mentors and partners to offer a range of effective, accessible and flexible learning opportunities in prisons and the community

Values

At Shannon Trust, we value:

The individual

We are supportive and non-judgmental – with our learners, mentors, volunteers and each other. By focusing on learners' unique and individual needs, we can grow skills and confidence so they can reach their full potential.

Collaboration

We can't achieve our vision alone, so we are resourceful and collaborative. By working with mentors, volunteers and partner organisations, we can ensure our programmes are widely accessible across the criminal justice system and communities.

Inventiveness

We know reading can be the first step to transforming lives, yet we also recognise wider needs. Ambitious, energetic and creative, we take a learner-led approach to innovation to increase the breadth and impact of our work.

Beliefs

We believe that...

- nobody should be left out of learning
- self-belief is essential to personal growth
- learning can increase confidence, transform lives and reduce reoffending

Looking after our people

At Shannon Trust, we value great people that work hard and have the skills and abilities to make a difference. We know the work we do can be challenging, so we want to recognise and reward our team members for their dedication. Our employee benefits package puts you front and centre, so you feel valued working with us.

Pay and other benefits



Living Wage employer

We are an accredited Living Wage employer.



Pension scheme

We will contribute up to 5% towards your pension, provided you contribute 7%.



Working from home

Employees that are required to work from home will receive an annual tax free allowance.



Reward Gateway

Our employee discount platform is available to all Shannon Trust employees.



Death in service

Should the worst happen, your nominated beneficiaries will receive a payment of 2 x your salary.

Putting you first



Generous annual holiday allowance (30 days FTE).



Flexible working, subject to the requirements of your role.



We will pay for you to have an annual flu jab.



We will contribute up to £100 per year to support your mental and physical wellbeing.



You will have access to a confidential and independent 24/7 helpline with qualified counsellors and advisors.



We will pay for you to have a standard annual eye test and contribute £50 towards glasses or contact lenses if needed.



Once you've passed your probationary period, you will get 6 weeks of sick pay at full pay, then 6 weeks at half pay. We also support our staff with up to 5 days of paid compassionate leave, if it's needed.



In recognition of the importance of volunteering, you can take 2 days per year as paid leave to volunteer for other charities or voluntary groups.



We support parents and families with enhanced maternity, adoption and paternity leave, which is also available to same sex parents on the same basis.

Find out more about our [employee benefits on our website](#).

Key information

Location:	Home based, anywhere in the UK
Reporting to:	CEO
Hours:	Full time (35 hours per week)
Salary:	£70,000-75,000 depending on experience

Role summary

The National Director of Operations will provide strategic and operational leadership for Shannon Trust's learning programmes across both prison and community settings. They will ensure high quality, consistent and scalable delivery of reading and numeracy support within the prison estate - where Shannon Trust operates in prisons across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, with an ambition to reach into Scotland - and in community environments where the charity increasingly offers learning opportunities beyond custody.

This leader will drive excellence, partnership working and innovation to meet rising demand for accessible, learner centred support across the criminal justice system and wider communities. The role has direct line management responsibility for a team of six Regional Managers.

Our values

At Shannon Trust we value the individual. We are supportive and non-judgmental – with our learners, mentors, volunteers and each other.

We work with many people across the criminal justice system and beyond, supporting them to improve their basic literacy and numeracy skills. Developing those skills is critical in reducing re-offending and improving life chances. We want to take every step possible to encourage those with lived experience into employment.

We are an accredited 'Ban the Box' employer, meaning we do not ask applicants to declare convictions at the application or interview stage. We only ask for this information where necessary for the role, and not until after an offer of employment has been made.

If a role involves prison security vetting, it's important to acknowledge that this process can involve lengthy wait times for the vetting to be completed, particularly for candidates with lived experience. At Shannon Trust, we're here to stand by our candidates, offering support every step of the way.

Equity, diversity, inclusion & belonging

We want everyone to feel welcome, respected, and able to do their best work. We're an equitable and inclusive organisation and actively encourage applications from underrepresented or marginalised communities.

We're committed to making the recruitment process as accessible as possible so if you need any reasonable adjustments at any stage, just let us know and we're happy to support you. Also to help you prepare and feel confident, we share the key interview questions in advance with all candidates.

Use of AI

Shannon Trust commits to not using Artificial Intelligence (AI) at any stage in the recruitment process; all applications are fully assessed by a member of our team.

We know applying for jobs can take time and can feel tricky to get right. At Shannon Trust, we want to hear your voice, your experience and your motivation, not something generated by AI tools like ChatGPT or CoPilot.

Applications written in your own words help us understand what makes you the right fit for the role and allow us to assess everyone fairly. To keep the process fair for all candidates, applications that appear to be generated by AI may not be considered.

Right to work in the UK and visa sponsorship

To work at Shannon Trust you must already live in, and have the right to work in, the UK (for example, UK citizenship, settled or pre-settled status or a visa that allows you to work). Unfortunately, we're not able to provide visa sponsorship for any roles at this time.

How to apply

- [find out more and apply](#)

Closing date: Monday 11th May, 5pm.

Interviews (online) to be held during the week commencing 18th May 2026.

Job description

In this pivotal leadership role, you will provide strategic and operational leadership for our learning programmes in prisons and community settings. You will ensure high quality, consistent and accessible delivery, overseeing a team of six Regional Managers and a wider workforce of around 65 staff, volunteers and over 2,000 peer mentors trained each year.

Working closely with senior colleagues, partner organisations and national bodies such as HMPPS, you will drive programme excellence, innovation and partnership working. You will also play a key role in new business development, operational strategy, contractual delivery and ensuring we can reliably demonstrate the impact of our work.

Strategic Leadership

- Develop and deliver a national operational strategy that supports organisational goals, ensuring delivery of high quality, accessible reading and numeracy programmes across both prison and community settings, aligned with organisational strategic aims.
- Advise the CEO and Senior Leadership Team on all operational matters.
- Work closely with the Delivery Partnership Manager to strengthen strategic relationships with His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), prison leadership teams, education providers and community partners to maximise programme reach and effectiveness.
- Represent the charity in national forums, working groups and sector initiatives to advance literacy and numeracy support across the justice system.
- Work with colleagues to identify, assess and pursue new business opportunities, including expansion of delivery into new establishments and community based settings.

Workforce Leadership

- Line manage regional leaders, building a cohesive national operational culture.
- Ensure regional managers provide strong, visible leadership to a nationally distributed workforce including an operational staff team of approximately 65 people, volunteers and peer mentors (with more than 2,000 new mentors trained annually).
- Foster a culture of collaboration, inclusivity and learner centred practice.
- Lead workforce development initiatives to ensure staff and volunteers are equipped to deliver effective, person-centred support.
- Work closely with the Communications team to ensure effective internal communication with staff and volunteers, enhancing cohesion, clarity and engagement across a geographically dispersed team.

Operational Management

- Provide strategic and operational oversight to ensure delivery of Shannon Trust programmes across all participating prisons and community programmes, ensuring high quality, safe and reliable learning experiences for learners and mentors.
- Deliver contractual obligations with excellence, including those linked to government funded work, while also ensuring robust oversight, quality and impact across non contracted, charitably funded programmes.
- Ensure operational policies and quality assurance processes are robust and effectively implemented.
- Provide clarity, guidance and senior level support to external stakeholders including prison governors, Group/Executive Directors, Probation leads and other partners to ensure successful operational delivery.

Data, Impact & Reporting

- Review, establish and maintain data practices that ensure we collect the right information to reliably evidence our impact.
- Oversee collection and use of accurate operational data to assess programme scale and impact, contributing to reports for the Board, funders and external stakeholders.
- Ensure timely operational intelligence is shared internally to inform strategic decision making.

Performance, Risk and Compliance

- Contribute to the organisational risk register, owning operational risk management and ensuring that risks are identified, mitigated and escalated appropriately.
- Work with business support colleagues to ensure robust monitoring and evaluation systems are in place, enabling reliable reporting, quality assurance and continuous improvement.
- Lead on safeguarding compliance, ensuring all legal and reporting obligations are met and that safeguarding systems, processes and training for all staff and volunteers are effective, up to date and well embedded.

Financial & Resource Management

- Manage operational budgets aligned with organisational priorities and funder requirements.
- Ensure efficient allocation of resources across regions and programmes.
- Support Business Development colleagues in designing operational components of bids and partnerships.
- Work with Regional Managers and Business Development colleagues to ensure contracts are accurately priced and that all tender processes are managed efficiently and effectively.
- Contribute operational insight to fundraising and income generation efforts, providing case studies, learner stories, data, feedback and quotes for external communications, website and social channels.

Other

- Putting the learner at the heart of what you do, actively contribute to a culture of learning, reflection, team work and development, behaving at all times in line with the organisation's values.
- Participate in regular one-to-ones, annual reviews, and learning needs analysis, contributing to the identification of objectives and professional development goals.
- Carry out health and safety responsibilities in accordance with the Health & Safety Policy.
- To undertake other duties and responsibilities commensurate with the role, as may be reasonably required by Shannon Trust or as a mutually agreed development opportunity. This document will be subject to periodic review in consultation with the job holder.
- Protecting Children and Vulnerable Adults is a core responsibility of all staff. Staff are expected to alert their line manager to any concerns they may have regarding the abuse or inappropriate treatment of a Child or Young Person, or Vulnerable Adults.

Person specification

Experience

Essential requirements	Desirable requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior leadership experience in operational delivery within a complex, multi site organisation (preferably within criminal justice, education, social impact, or related fields). • Involvement in organisational strategic and business planning and review processes. • Experience of successfully managing projects including: planning, building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, and monitoring & evaluation. • Previous budget responsibility: setting, monitoring and reporting against. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience working with statutory agencies or large public sector bodies such as HMPPS. • Experience of managing large scale programmes.

Skills and abilities

Essential requirements	Desirable requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proven ability to lead distributed teams of staff and volunteers, drive performance and embed consistent standards. • Strong strategic thinking, problem solving and organisational skills. • Excellent relationship building and influencing skills, with the ability influence and negotiate: people including senior officials and civil servants, prison staff and Mentors, to support the effective delivery of Shannon Trust programmes. • Line management of staff including performance management, professional development. • Ability to prioritise your workload, work autonomously and balance the needs of multiple programmes and priorities. 	

Essential requirements	Desirable requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to write clear, succinct reports, emails and other key communications. • Ability to work in a results focused way, with a focus on the best outcomes for learners and staff. • Ability to foster and demonstrate the values, aims and objectives of Shannon Trust in your work. 	

Knowledge and understanding

Essential requirements	Desirable requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the reasons why adults might not be able to read, and the personal and practical barriers to engaging with education faced by people in prison and the community. • Knowledge and understanding of the criminal justice system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of safeguarding, prison operations, or rehabilitation frameworks. • Familiarity with peer led learning models or alternative education environments.

Technical and qualifications

Essential requirements	Desirable requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A degree level education or significant track record experience in education, criminal justice, social work or similar. • IT literate with experience of using Microsoft Office. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience using databases for effective record keeping. (E.g. Salesforce).

Personal characteristics

Essential requirements	Desirable requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to Shannon Trust's values: individual centred support, collaboration, inclusivity and creativity in meeting learner needs. • Thrives working in rapidly changing and challenging environments. • Performance minded and results orientated, with learners at the heart of what you do. • Non-judgemental attitude and committed to anti discriminatory and inclusive working practices. 	

Essential requirements	Desirable requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approachable and able to form positive working relationships.	

Circumstances

- Must currently reside in, and have the right to work in the UK
- Able to accommodate a home office or have access to other suitable office facilities
- Able to travel to prisons and community sites to attend meetings in a timely manner and staff/volunteer meetings in a central location.
- Appointment will be dependent upon successful security vetting by His Majesty's Prison & Probation Service.