

Role: Chief Operating Officer (COO)**Reports to:** CEO**Direct Reports:** Senior Leadership Team, including:

- Head of Provision
 - Head of Development
 - Head of Marketing & Communications
- (+ future Heads of Department as the organisation grows)

Salary: £55,000 - £60,000**Hours:** 40 hours per week, with flexibility to work occasional evenings, weekends and travel as required.**Location:** Project 21 Clubhouse, Units 1–3 Brightwell Barns, Suffolk, with regular travel across Project 21 locations and partner sites as required.**PURPOSE**

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) is a senior leadership position responsible for translating Project 21's vision into outstanding day-to-day operations. Working in close partnership with the CEO, the postholder will provide strategic and operational leadership across the charity, ensuring services are delivered safely, efficiently and to the highest possible standard.

The COO will lead organisational development, operational performance, systems, governance, financial management and people leadership, enabling the CEO to focus on strategic growth, partnerships, fundraising, influencing and the long-term Big Build vision.

As the charity's senior operational leader, the COO will provide executive leadership across the organisation, deputising for the CEO where appropriate and helping to ensure the continued growth, sustainability and long-term success of Project 21.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES**Strategic Leadership**

- Support the CEO in delivering Project 21's strategic plan and long-term vision
- Translate strategic objectives into effective operational delivery
- Lead organisational planning, implementation and continuous improvement
- Develop organisational systems, processes and infrastructure that support sustainable growth and operational excellence
- Deputise for the CEO where appropriate, providing executive leadership across the organisation
- Support the CEO and Trustee Board through effective reporting, governance and strategic planning

Operational Leadership

Provide strategic oversight of all frontline and operational services, including:

- Community-based learning
- Performing arts provision
- Residential services
- Family support services
- Transport
- Business support and administration
- Facilities and premises
- Health & Safety
- Safeguarding
- Information technology and digital systems

- Quality assurance and continuous improvement

Ensure all services are safe, person-centred, efficient and aligned with Project 21's values, strategic objectives and regulatory requirements.

The COO will have delegated authority from the CEO to lead the day-to-day management of the organisation, enabling timely operational decision-making while working collaboratively with the CEO and Trustee Board on strategic matters.

People, Leadership & Culture

Provide strategic leadership of Project 21's people function, ensuring the charity attracts, develops and retains a skilled, motivated and values-led workforce, while leading the Senior Leadership Team to deliver the organisation's strategic objectives.

Responsible for:

- Leadership and performance management of the Senior Leadership Team
- Workforce planning and organisational design
- Recruitment, onboarding, retention and talent acquisition
- Learning, development and succession planning
- Employee engagement, wellbeing and organisational culture
- HR policies, employment law and regulatory compliance
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Employee relations, performance management and accountability
- Reward, recognition and retention initiatives
- Oversight of payroll and employee benefits
- Developing leadership capability across the organisation
- Leading organisational change and continuous improvement
- Deputising for the CEO where required

Promote a positive, inclusive and high-performing workplace culture, ensuring colleagues are supported, empowered and equipped to deliver exceptional services while reflecting Project 21's values.

Organisational Development

Lead organisational development across Project 21, ensuring the charity remains efficient, scalable and well-positioned for sustainable growth.

Responsible for:

- Operational systems and infrastructure
- Policies, procedures and organisational processes
- Digital transformation and technology
- CRM and business systems implementation and optimisation
- Governance, compliance and regulatory requirements
- Risk management and business continuity
- Performance monitoring and quality assurance
- Organisational change and continuous improvement

Drive innovation and operational excellence, ensuring Project 21 has the systems, processes and infrastructure required to support sustainable growth and deliver exceptional services.

Financial Management

Working in partnership with the CEO and Trustee Board to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of Project 21.

Responsible for:

- Monitoring financial performance and organisational budgets
- Overseeing operational expenditure and financial controls
- Driving financial efficiency and value for money
- Supporting the development and delivery of annual budgets and financial forecasts
- Identifying operational savings and investment opportunities
- Monitoring financial risks and supporting effective resource allocation
- Contributing to long-term financial planning and organisational sustainability
- Presenting and interpreting operational and financial performance information for the CEO and Trustee Board

Ensure resources are managed responsibly, enabling Project 21 to maximise its impact while maintaining strong financial governance, resilience and accountability.

Governance & Compliance

Ensure Project 21 operates in accordance with all legal, regulatory and governance requirements.

Responsible for:

- Charity Commission compliance
- Health & Safety
- Data protection (GDPR)
- Employment law
- Safeguarding
- Quality assurance and regulatory standards
- Organisational policies and governance
- Risk management and business continuity
- Internal audit and compliance monitoring
- Supporting the Trustee Board with governance matters
- Lead organisational policy review and implementation

Maintain robust governance, effective risk management and a strong culture of compliance, ensuring Project 21 meets its legal obligations while protecting its members, colleagues, reputation and assets.

Partnerships & Stakeholder Engagement

Develop and maintain productive relationships with key stakeholders to support the effective delivery and continued growth of Project 21.

Responsible for:

- Project 21 members and families
- Project 21 colleagues and volunteers
- Local Authorities and commissioners
- Education providers
- Healthcare professionals and services
- Employers and work placement partners
- Community organisations and voluntary sector partners

- Regulatory and professional bodies
- Professional advisers and external suppliers

Represent Project 21 professionally at meetings, events and partnership forums, building trusted relationships that enhance collaboration, strengthen operational delivery and improve outcomes for members and their families.

Big Build

Support the CEO in delivering Project 21's long-term Big Build vision by:

- Ensuring the charity's operational infrastructure is capable of supporting significant future growth
- Leading operational planning and organisational readiness for expansion
- Developing systems, processes and governance to support new services and facilities
- Supporting the implementation of major organisational projects associated with the Big Build

Support the successful transition from Project 21's current operating model to a scalable, sustainable organisation capable of delivering its long-term vision.

General Responsibilities

- Act as an ambassador for Project 21, representing the charity positively and professionally at all time
- Champion equality, diversity, inclusion and person-centred practice throughout the organisation
- Uphold and promote Project 21's vision, values and culture, leading by example in all aspects of the role
- Demonstrate the highest standards of integrity, professionalism, accountability and ethical leadership
- Maintain confidentiality and exercise sound judgement when handling sensitive organisational information
- Work flexibly to meet the needs of the organisation, including occasional evenings, weekends and travel where required
- Undertake any other duties commensurate with the seniority and responsibilities of the role

PERSON SPECIFICATION

ESSENTIAL

Experience

- Senior leadership experience within a charity, education, health or social care setting
- Experience leading multi-disciplinary teams
- Experience managing organisational change
- Experience overseeing budgets
- Experience developing organisational systems
- Experience implementing strategic plans
- Experience of governance and compliance

Knowledge

- Charity governance
- Safeguarding
- HR and employment practice
- Health & Safety
- Financial management
- Risk management
- Operational planning

Skills

- Outstanding leadership

- Strategic thinking
- Excellent communication
- High emotional intelligence
- Decision making
- Coaching and mentoring
- Organisation
- Problem solving
- Negotiation
- Influencing

Personal Qualities

- Inspirational leader
- Calm under pressure
- Values-driven
- Innovative
- Compassionate
- Highly organised
- Collaborative
- Professional
- Resilient
- Adaptable

DESIRABLE

- Degree or equivalent qualification
- ILM/CMI leadership qualification
- Charity leadership experience
- Experience of scaling an organisation
- Experience implementing CRM or digital systems
- Knowledge of adult social care and education
- Understanding of Down's Syndrome and person-centred support

SUCCESS MEASURES

Within the first 12 months, the successful postholder will:

- Successfully lead the operational delivery of Project 21 across all locations, maintaining consistently high standards of quality, safety and member experience
- Strengthen organisational systems, processes and operational infrastructure to support future growth
- Successfully implement and embed the charity's CRM and wider digital systems across the organisation
- Improve operational efficiency, consistency and cross-department collaboration
- Strengthen leadership capability, accountability and succession planning across the Senior Leadership Team
- Maintain excellent standards of safeguarding, governance, compliance and risk management
- Support the charity's continued financial sustainability through effective operational and financial management
- Ensure Project 21 is operationally prepared to support the future delivery of the Big Build vision
- Enable the CEO to dedicate significantly more time to strategic leadership, major partnerships, income generation and the Big Build programme

By the end of the first year, Project 21 will have a stronger operational foundation, enabling the charity to grow sustainably while maintaining exceptional quality, governance and person-centred support.