



Somerset Skills & Learning (SS&L)
Board Director Recruitment
May 2026

CHANGING LIVES THROUGH LEARNING.



Introduction from our Chair

I am delighted you are considering applying to join the Board of SS&L at this pivotal moment, and I hope you find the information in this pack helpful as you explore the opportunity further.

As an independent Community Interest Company, we support around 4,000 learners each year, collaborate with more than 145 employers, and deliver learning across a wide range of community venues. Our work improves skills, confidence, wellbeing, employability, and life chances across Somerset and surrounding areas, creating meaningful and lasting impact for individuals and communities alike.

We operate within a further education landscape that is both challenging and evolving, shaped by increasing regulatory scrutiny, a strong focus on inspection and quality, ongoing funding pressures, and the growing importance of partnership working. Alongside this, the sector continues to respond to local and national priorities around inclusion, skills development and economic growth, requiring organisations like SS&L to remain agile, collaborative and forward-looking in how we deliver our mission.

We are now seeking two new Independent Non-Executive Directors to strengthen our Board and help guide SS&L through its next phase of growth, impact and long-term sustainability.

Having spent seven fulfilling years on the Board, including three as Chair, I will be stepping down in November 2026 to make way for a new Chair. We hope to identify my successor through this recruitment process, ensuring continuity and a strong platform for the future.

The Board is entering an exciting period of development and renewal as it continues to strengthen its role in supporting high-quality education and positive outcomes for learners, employers and communities. Over the coming year, the Board will play a central role in a comprehensive governance review to ensure that our structures, processes and practices reflect sector best practice and are aligned with our strategic ambitions. Alongside this, Governors will take part in a programme of engagement and development designed to build collective effectiveness, deepen understanding of the education landscape, and support the Board to operate to the highest standard.

A key priority will be continuing to develop strong, collaborative relationships with the Executive Directors and senior leadership team, ensuring the Board provides both constructive challenge and strategic support as SS&L moves confidently into its next phase of development and impact.

This is a unique opportunity to contribute at a senior level to an organisation that is making a tangible difference. If you are inspired by what you read, share our commitment to improving lives through learning, and can bring the skills and experience needed to help shape our future, I would very much welcome your application.

Nicola Squibb, Non-Executive Chair





About SS&L

SS&L became a Community Interest Company in 2015, separating from Somerset County Council. This independence allows us to innovate, respond to local needs, and reinvest every surplus back into our communities.

Today we:

- Generate around £3.5m annual income
- Employ 104 staff
- Deliver community learning, apprenticeships, study programmes, supported internships, and adult education
- Focus on health, wellbeing, employability, and lifelong learning

Our learners include people returning to work, those learning English for the first time, and young people gaining confidence through supported internships and apprenticeships.

“SS&L shouldn’t underestimate the positive impact their courses have on those who attend.”
Wendie, Community Learning

Our Purpose

Mission: Changing lives through learning

Vision: SS&L is an exceptional, transformative, and accessible learning provider, delivering education and skills development across the South West

Strategic aims:

- Grow our provision in response to need
- Sustain strong financial health
- Embed a culture of excellence and customer focus
- Improve the health and wellbeing of Somerset communities



Business Strategy Summary (2025-2026)

Strategic Aims

Grow and develop our curriculum to meet identified needs

- Expand curriculum to respond to demand and meet growth targets
- Be Somerset's go-to provider for alternative 16 - 19 and supported provision

Sustain good financial health

- Develop and implement a business development strategy
- Conduct a cost efficiency review
- Identify opportunities for income diversification and partnerships

Be customer-focused and embed a culture of excellence

- Promote and embed SS&L's values
- Exceed expectations through our quality strategy and customer service
- Achieve a "Strong" OFSTED outcome
- Improve processes through digital transformation

Have a positive impact on our communities

- Proudly highlight, share, and celebrate the positive impact of our work with all stakeholders

KPIs

- Increase income from apprenticeships by 9%
- Increase income from 16 to 19 programmes by 15%
- Maintain learner satisfaction rate of 95%
- Increase achievements for apprenticeships & qualifications to 80%
- Increase achievements for 16 to 19 to 66%
- Maintain achievements for Tailored Learning of 95%
- Achieve budget and performance for 2025/26
- Increase employer satisfaction rate to "excellent"
- Increase staff satisfaction with systems and processes to 60%
- Increase staff satisfaction levels with CPD opportunities to 85%
- Increase staff satisfaction levels with career development to 86%
- Increase level of staff who see themselves at SS&L in a year to 75%



Our Values



Collaboration
Achieving more,
together



Growth
Nurturing
personal growth



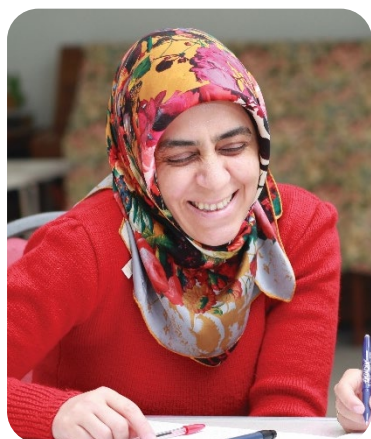
Excellence
Going above
& beyond



Innovation
Forward thinking,
brighter futures

Real impact, real people

Behind every statistic is a story:



Hatice regained confidence and identity through learning English



Molly developed skills and her career through an apprenticeship with local employers



Charley progressed from a Supported Internship into employment

Our work has been recognised externally:

“SS&L is clearly a unique organisation, working tirelessly every day to make a significant and lasting difference to people’s lives across Somerset.”

Award judges



Finances

Our core funding is sourced through government bodies, such as DfE and local authorities, to deliver high-quality education and training to individuals to meet identified needs and priorities. Funding sources include:

- Direct contract with DFE for 16 – 19
- Direct contract with DFE for Apprenticeships
- Contract with Somerset Council for delivery of Tailored Learning


With constant change to how post-16 education is funded and procured, considering the plan for further devolution of funding, as well as political uncertainty, it is critical that we focus on diversifying our income streams, maintaining quality standards, and growing our direct contracts (Apprenticeships and 16 – 19 funding).

Additionally, overheads must be regularly reviewed to ensure that they are proportionate to our income and maintained at a sustainable level. In response to a significant shift in contracting arrangements for Somerset’s Community Learning delivery in 2023/24, resulting in a £1M reduction in turnover, several challenging decisions had to be made to ensure the company’s sustainability.

Annual Accounts

Governance and the Board

SS&L is membership-owned and governed by a Board of Directors (members), currently comprising:

<p>Board of Directors (all members)</p> <p>Responsible for governance, strategic direction, and review of performance</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 x Non-Executive Directors, Nicola Squibb-Chair, James Goss - NED• 2 x Elected Staff Directors• 2 x Executive Directors - Kathryn Baker - CEO, Justin Spiers – Director of Curriculum & Quality
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The Board sets strategic direction, ensures strong governance and financial stewardship, and provides constructive challenge and insight.

Subsidiary Governance

SS&L is the parent company of, Little Discoveries Childcare Ltd, which delivers high-quality early years provision aligned to our wider mission. As part of our governance structure, one of the appointed Non-Executive Directors will also be required to take on the role of Chair of the Little Discoveries Childcare Ltd Board. This provides an opportunity to extend your strategic impact across both organisations, ensuring strong alignment, effective oversight and continued quality and sustainability within our childcare provision.



Board Appointments

As SS&L enters this pivotal phase, we are seeking two Independent Non-Executive Directors to strengthen our Board and support our ambitions:

Non-Executive Director – Finance & Sustainability

You will help safeguard SS&L's long-term financial health and support sustainable, values-led growth.

We are looking for:

- Senior-level experience in finance, audit, investment or commercial leadership
- Strong understanding of financial governance, risk and assurance
- Confidence providing constructive challenge on budgets, investment, and strategic growth
- Experience within complex funding, non-profit or public value environments (*desirable*)

You will contribute to:

- Financial strategy and sustainability
- Robust risk management and internal controls
- Informed decision-making that balances impact and resilience

This role is ideal for someone motivated to apply their financial expertise to an organisation delivering clear social value.

Non-Executive Director – Further Education Quality & Impact

This role will help ensure SS&L continues to deliver high-quality provision and strong outcomes for learners, employers and communities.

We are looking for:

- Senior leadership experience within Further Education, skills, training, or inspection
- Strong understanding of quality assurance, learner outcomes, and continuous improvement
- Insight into regulatory and inspection frameworks (e.g. Ofsted)
- Commitment to inclusion, progression, and lifelong learning

You will contribute to:

- Quality assurance and improvement
- Enhancing the learner experience, progression and outcomes



- Strategic curriculum development aligned to community and employer need

This role suits someone passionate about educational integrity and making a tangible difference to learners' lives.

Chair

From one of these NED appointments, we are hoping to identify our new Chair, and we are particularly interested in candidates who have previous Chair or Vice-Chair experience, either as a Trustee or NED. This is an opportunity not only to join the Board, but to help lead SS&L into its next chapter.

Roles Profiles in Appendix

Commitment

The Chair commitment is currently circa 5 hours per month, and for NEDs a little less.

Four Board meetings per year (2 hours, hybrid)

- Membership of one or more Board sub-committees (4 meetings per year)
 - Audit & Finance
 - Curriculum & Quality
 - Remuneration (annual)

Remuneration: These are voluntary roles; travel and subsistence expenses are reimbursed.

Why join SS&L?

Board members consistently tell us this role is rewarding because:

- You can see the direct impact of decisions on people's lives
- The organisation is values-driven but commercially realistic
- The Board culture is collaborative, open and supportive
- Your expertise genuinely makes a difference





How to apply

If you are interested in this opportunity, we encourage confidential conversations with our recruitment partner Anna Jay, MD of Public Leaders Appointments in advance of your application. You can contact Anna at: anna@publicleadersappointments.com or 07904 236 348.

Applications should be sent to applications@publicleadersappointments.com with reference 'SS&L by midday on 21st May 2026.

Your application should consist of a CV or bio, supported by a covering letter outlining your motivations for applying and highlighting how your skills, knowledge and experience meet the requirements of our new Chair or NED. We recommend that each document should be no more than three pages.

Interviews will take place on 10th or 11th June 2026 (tbc).

SS&L recognises the positive value of diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination. We welcome and encourage applications from people of all backgrounds.

If you are interested in contributing to SS&L's future, we encourage you to get in touch to find out more.



Appendix – Role Profiles

Chair of the Board of Directors

Overview of the role

The Chair of the Board of Directors will provide strategic leadership to SS&L CIC, ensuring the effectiveness of the Board and the highest standards of governance across the organisation. The Chair will play a pivotal role in enabling the Board of Directors to operate cohesively, providing constructive challenge and support to the executive leadership team, and ensuring that the organisation delivers on its mission, vision and values.

The post holder will bring significant experience of leadership at Board level, with the ability to guide discussions, build consensus, and ensure that decisions are taken in the best long-term interests of the organisation, its members and stakeholders.

The Chair will work closely with the Chief Executive Officer, maintaining an appropriate balance between support and challenge, while remaining independent from the operational management of the organisation. The role is non-executive in nature, ensuring objectivity and impartiality in all matters.

SS&L strives to deliver the highest quality of provision to learners, and the Chair will play a key role in ensuring that the organisation is well-governed, financially sustainable, and strategically focused in achieving this aim.

Job description – Main duties and responsibilities

Leadership of the Board and promotion of best practice

- Provide leadership to the Board of Directors, ensuring its effectiveness in setting and delivering the organisation's strategic direction;
- Promote the success of SS&L with consideration to its vision, mission and values – including employees, learners, the long-term impact of decisions, financial sustainability and strategic priorities;
- Ensure that the Board operates to the highest standards of corporate governance, probity and integrity;
- Plan and chair Board meetings effectively, ensuring that discussions are focused, inclusive, and lead to clear decisions and actions;
- Ensure that Directors receive accurate, timely and clear information to support effective decision-making;
- Promote a culture of constructive challenge, openness and accountability within the Board;
- Ensure that the Board of Directors satisfactorily oversees and evaluates the implementation of strategies, policies, business plans and Board decisions;
- Support the development of a high-performing and cohesive Board, including induction, development and succession planning of Directors;



- Ensure that the organisation is openly and transparently accountable to funders, customers and stakeholders;
- Act within the powers of the CIC as set out in the organisation's constitution.

Relationship with the Chief Executive Officer

- Establish and maintain a strong, effective and constructive working relationship with the Chief Executive Officer;
- Provide support, guidance and appropriate challenge to the Chief Executive Officer;
- Ensure that clear boundaries are maintained between governance and operational management;
- Lead on the performance appraisal and development of the Chief Executive Officer;
- Act as a key point of contact for the Chief Executive Officer between Board meetings, providing continuity and support.

Role within the Board of Directors

- Ensure that the Board of Directors acts in the best long-term interests of the organisation, its members and stakeholders;
- Facilitate effective contribution from all Directors, drawing on their skills, experience and expertise;
- Ensure that the Board gives due consideration to quality of provision, financial sustainability, risk, and organisational performance;
- Represent SS&L in an open and positive way, acting as an ambassador for the organisation with key stakeholders, partners, funders and the wider community;
- Support the development of strong governance structures, including committees where appropriate (e.g. Audit and Risk);
- Promote the development of a listening organisation attuned to the voice of its members, learners and stakeholders.

Job description – General duties

- Maintain ethical working practices;
- Support the CIC in achieving its mission and values;
- Work in accordance with all policies and procedures of the CIC;
- Carry out any other duties as required by the organisation from time to time.

The above list of duties is indicative only and not exhaustive. The Chair will be expected to carry out all such additional duties as are reasonable and commensurate with the role.



Person specification – Knowledge and experience

- Significant Board-level experience, including experience of chairing or vice-chairing Boards or committees;
- Proven leadership experience at a senior level within a complex organisation;
- Strong understanding of corporate governance and the role of a Board of Directors;
- Experience of working with or within the education, public, voluntary or social enterprise sectors (desirable);
- Track record of strategic leadership and delivering organisational success;
- Experience of supporting and constructively challenging senior executives;
- Understanding of financial oversight, risk management and organisational sustainability.

Person specification – Technical skills

- Excellent leadership and facilitation skills, with the ability to chair meetings effectively;
- Ability to build consensus and manage differing perspectives at Board level;
- Strong interpersonal and communication skills, with the ability to influence and engage a wide range of stakeholders;
- Ability to interpret complex information and support robust decision-making;
- High level of emotional intelligence, judgement and integrity;
- Ability to provide constructive challenge and support;
- Strategic thinker with the ability to maintain focus on long-term priorities;
- Commitment to the values and mission of SS&L.



Non-Executive Director for Quality Assurance and Improvement

Overview of the role

The Non-Executive Director for Quality Assurance and Improvement will provide the SS&L CIC with Post 16 education Sector expertise and experience; as such they will significantly contribute to the work of the Board of Directors and the success of the organisation.

The post holder will bring significant insight gained from experience in the sector, with extensive knowledge and understanding of Ofsted requirements and leading improvement strategies to bring about grade change within institutions. The role is removed from the operational function of the organisation, allowing the Non-Executive Director to bring an impartial and objective perspective.

The Non-Executive Director for Quality Assurance and Improvement will be selected for their experience, skills and expertise. SS&L strives to deliver the highest quality of provision to learners, and this post would support the delivery of the quality improvement plan through rigorous challenge and recommendations for further improvement.

Job description - Main duties and responsibilities

- Promotion of best practice across the Board of Directors
- Promote the success of SS&L with consideration to its vision, mission and values - this includes having regard for employees, learners, the long term impact of decisions, scrutinising finances and taking decisions on strategy.
- Ensure that SS&L improves outcomes for learners and benefits the community.
- Ensure that the governance of the CIC is of the highest possible standard, and that it is openly and transparently accountable to funders, customers and stakeholders.
- Act within the powers of the CIC as set out in the organisation's constitution.
- Promote the development of a listening organisation attuned to the voice of its members and stakeholders.
- To provide support and advice to the Chief Executive Officer as appropriate and provide effective liaison and continuity of communication on developments occurring between formal Board meetings.

Role within the Board of Directors

- Provide counsel / advice to (in particular) the Chief Executive Officer and Director of Quality Improvement & Learning Wellbeing in relation to quality assurance and improvement.
- To act as an unbiased, objective and impartial member of the Board of Directors, ensuring that all decisions are taken in the best long term interest of the organisation, its members and stakeholders.
- Represent SS&L in an open and positive way to the local community and help build partnerships with customers, partners, communities, regulators and other stakeholders.



Job description - General duties

- Maintain ethical working practices;
- Support the CIC in achieving its mission and values;
- Work in accordance with all policies and procedures of the CIC;
- Carry out any other duties as requested by the organisation, from time to time.

The above list of duties is indicative only and not exhaustive. Non-Executive Directors will be expected to carry out all such additional duties as are reasonable commensurate with the role.

Person specification - Knowledge and experience

- Board of Director level experience;
- Senior Management experience within the Post 16 education sector, with particular experience of developing and implementing strategies for quality improvement
- Sound understanding of corporate governance and Board responsibilities.
- Track record of active leadership and achieving positive change;
- Ability to scrutinise and monitor systems, processes and outcomes.

Person specification – Technical skills

- Detailed knowledge and understanding of the Inspection Framework, and Ofsted requirements.
- Excellent communication skills, interpersonal and networking skills.
- Ability to interpret and translate data.
- Ability to build constructive relationships with Directors, staff and stakeholders.
- Ability to present the views of the Board of Directors in public.
- Ability to chair meetings.
- Creative and flexible thinker.
- Possess an entrepreneurial spirit.
- Ability to provide constructive challenge and support.



Non-Executive Director for Finance & Sustainability

Overview of the role

The Non-Executive Director for Finance & Sustainability will provide SS&L CIC with strategic financial expertise and oversight, alongside experience in ensuring long-term organisational sustainability. As such, they will make a significant contribution to the work of the Board of Directors and the success of the organisation.

The post holder will bring substantial insight gained from senior-level financial leadership, including experience of financial planning, risk management, and securing organisational resilience. They will support the Board in ensuring robust financial governance, effective use of resources, and the long-term sustainability of the organisation.

The role is removed from the operational function of the organisation, allowing the Non-Executive Director to bring an impartial and objective perspective. The intention is for the Non-Executive Director to have a staggered period of tenure of 2–3 years.

The Non-Executive Director for Finance & Sustainability will be selected for their experience, skills and expertise. SS&L strives to deliver the highest quality of provision to learners, and this role will support that ambition by ensuring financial stability, sustainability, and value for money across all areas of operation.

Job description – Main duties and responsibilities

Promotion of best practice across the Board of Directors and financial sustainability

- Promote the success of SS&L with consideration to its vision, mission and values – including employees, learners, the long-term impact of decisions, financial sustainability, and strategic direction;
- Provide oversight and constructive challenge in relation to financial performance, financial planning, and resource allocation;
- Support the Board in ensuring the organisation operates within its financial means and delivers strong value for money;
- Advise on financial strategy, including income diversification, funding streams, and long-term financial resilience;
- Ensure that effective financial controls, risk management processes, and audit arrangements are in place and operating effectively;
- Support the Board of Directors to assess the financial implications of strategic decisions, business plans, and new initiatives;
- Ensure that SS&L improves outcomes for learners while maintaining financial sustainability;
- Ensure that the governance of the CIC is of the highest possible standard, and that it is openly and transparently accountable to funders, customers and stakeholders;
- Act within the powers of the CIC as set out in the organisation’s constitution;
- Promote the development of a listening organisation attuned to the voice of its members and stakeholders;



- Provide support and advice to the Chief Executive Officer as appropriate, ensuring effective liaison between Board meetings.

Role within the Board of Directors

- Provide counsel and advice to the Chief Executive Officer and senior leadership team on financial strategy, sustainability, and risk;
- Support the Board in scrutinising budgets, forecasts, financial reports, and funding proposals;
- Provide objective and impartial oversight of financial performance and organisational sustainability;
- Ensure that all decisions are taken in the best long-term financial and strategic interests of the organisation;
- Contribute to the development and monitoring of financial strategies that support growth and resilience;
- Represent SS&L in an open and positive way to the local community and help build confidence with funders, partners, regulators and stakeholders.

Job description – General duties

- Maintain ethical working practices;
- Support the CIC in achieving its mission and values;
- Work in accordance with all policies and procedures of the CIC;
- Carry out any other duties as requested by the organisation from time to time.

The above list of duties is indicative only and not exhaustive. Non-Executive Directors will be expected to carry out all such additional duties as are reasonable and commensurate with the role.

Person specification – Knowledge and experience

- Board-level or equivalent governance experience;
- Senior leadership experience in finance, accounting, or financial management;
- Experience of financial planning, budgeting, and organisational sustainability;
- Experience of working with complex funding models (e.g. public sector, grants, contracts, or social enterprise funding);
- Sound understanding of corporate governance and Board responsibilities;
- Track record of contributing to strategic decision-making and organisational success;
- Ability to scrutinise and interpret financial information and assess risk.

Person specification – Technical skills

- Strong financial literacy, with the ability to interpret accounts, forecasts, and financial reports;
- Understanding of financial controls, audit, compliance, and risk management;
- Ability to provide constructive challenge and support at Board level;
- Excellent communication, interpersonal and influencing skills;
- Ability to build constructive relationships with Directors, staff and stakeholders;



- Ability to present complex financial information clearly to non-financial audiences;
- Ability to chair meetings (desirable);
- Strategic thinker with sound judgement;
- Commitment to the values and mission of SS&L.

