



# Position Specification

**Central European University**  
**Private University – CEU GmbH**  
Rector/President

## Central European University

Central European University (CEU) is a distinguished, private, English-language research university located in Vienna. CEU is known for its emphasis on advanced research and academic excellence in the social sciences, humanities, law, public policy, cognitive science and data science. Founded in 1991, CEU fosters an international community of scholars and students from diverse backgrounds, dedicated to addressing complex societal challenges through interdisciplinary research and critical inquiry. The university is committed to promoting open societies and democratic governance, offering a unique educational experience that combines rigorous academic programs with a focus on innovation, diversity, and global engagement.

CEU is accredited in the US and in Austria. More information on the accreditation can be found here: [Accreditation | Central European University](#)

### Organisation

Information on CEU's governance can be found here: [Central Administration | Central European University](#)

Key facts and figures can be accessed here: [Facts and Figures](#)

## About the Office of the Rector/President

CEU invites nominations and applications for the position of Rector/President. Reporting to the Board of Trustees, the Rector/President oversees all academic and administrative areas of the Central European University. The incoming Rector/President will collaborate with stakeholders both within the campus community and externally to guide this distinctive institution into a transformative phase of its development.

Founded in 1991 by George Soros to promote the values and practices of an open society in the nations of Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism, Central European University rests on the assumption that excellent graduate education in the social sciences, delivered by active researchers, is essential to a thriving democracy. Originally a university dedicated exclusively to graduate study, the Central European University acquired undergraduate programs when it moved from Budapest to Vienna, forced to leave Hungary by Viktor Orban. Central European University is at a pivotal moment in its history as it reimagines its future, reshaping relationships between its Vienna campus and those programs remaining in Budapest, as well as renewing its partnership with Open Society Foundations with the goal of becoming an even more engaged, nimble university, able to respond to open society challenges with creative and rigorous education programs. It will need a bold, decisive, and experienced leader to guide the university through the necessary restructuring on a path towards renewed cohesion and stability. To this end, the next Rector/President will be responsible for building the assets and revenue streams that will create an exciting and enduring institution dedicated to the goals of an open society.





The Rector/President must be a visible and accessible leader to the student body, foster an environment where faculty can thrive, and recognise and value the contributions of staff. The Rector/President will be a dynamic, visionary academic leader and strategic thinker who possesses excellent judgment and diplomacy, a distinguished record of scholarship, personal and professional integrity, and a reputation for working collegially and collaboratively with internal and external constituencies. The Rector/President will also act as a catalyst for creativity, innovation, and progress that will build on the strong foundation that CEU has established.

The Rector/President reports to the Board of Trustees of the Central European University. The Rector/President is the Chief Executive Officer of the Central European University and exercises broad, delegated authority. The Rector/President is responsible for all aspects of campus operations, including administrative functions such as human resources, information technology, and budgeting; academic affairs, curriculum development; and student affairs. The Rector/President plays a vital external role, serving as lead fundraiser, a spokesperson in diverse external forums, and a partner to a wide range of public and private institutions.

In addition, the Rector/President's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Leading CEU's ongoing development and articulation of its values and mission and developing effective strategies to pursue that mission.
- Supporting the continued enhancement of CEU's academic, teaching, and research programs while ensuring ongoing excellence, quality, and breadth of its research programs and the distinction of its faculty.
- Advocating for additional funding, and generating new mission-aligned funding sources, resources, and revenue.
- Maintaining an effective working relationship with OSF and other donors.
- Representing the University to external audiences as its principal ambassador and advocate, ensuring that its work is at the forefront of global debates and in problem-solving.
- Harnessing the energies of all academic staff, students and professional services and encourage excellence in an atmosphere of trust and collegiality.
- Enhancing the reputation of the University for international research, academic excellence, top quality teaching and public engagement.
- Ensuring that the governance, administrative and internal management structures of the University are efficient and effective.
- Managing effective change and transformation through consultation and consensus-building.
- Developing a strong and cohesive senior leadership team.

## Qualifications & Experience

The next Rector/President of CEU will be a dynamic, visionary, accessible, and inclusive leader with intellectual credibility, management skill, and dedication to academic excellence. The Rector/President must possess a profound commitment to CEU's mission of fostering an open society and promoting academic freedom, actively advocating these principles within the university and in wider society. These qualities, harnessed to gifts as an advocate, will ensure this person leads with confidence and inspires that confidence in the whole CEU community.

### Required Qualifications

- An earned doctorate or an equivalent terminal degree. A strong academic background with a commitment to supporting and enhancing CEU's research initiatives, ensuring that academic excellence remains central to the university's mission.
- A record of exemplary scholarship commensurate with the University's high academic standards.
- Demonstrated success leading an academic organisation and serving as its spokesperson with government agencies, foundations, donors, alumni, business and community leaders, media, and other partners.
- An intellectually engaging and personal understanding of the broad CEU academic endeavour and a powerful personal commitment to the ideals of an open society.
- Firm grounding in the intellectual themes that are essential to the understanding of CEU's academic activity.
- The talent to synthesise the work of a diverse faculty and diverse student body and to communicate the excitement and the importance of CEU's work to a wide audience of students, new faculty, university peers, and major donors worldwide.
- Demonstrated record in developing financial support from both public and private sources.
- Experience working in and support for student-centred institutions with a particular appreciation for and understanding of a large, diverse student population.
- A high degree of cultural proficiency, trustworthiness, and emotional intelligence, combined with an appreciation for diversity and understanding when engaging with individuals from various backgrounds, cultures, and experiences.
- A record of success generating mission-aligned revenue from public and private sources and through partnerships using innovative revenue generating strategies.
- Demonstrated financial acumen, including understanding the consequences of financial and budgetary decisions, and a record of success in creating financially sustainable and transparent budget models.
- Experience in developing and implementing long-term financial strategies to ensure CEU's sustainability in concert with Open Society Foundations (OSF).
- Proven ability to envision, lead and be accountable for the execution of long-term vision and strategy; inspiring and empowering others to collaboratively achieve goals and aspirations.
- A commitment to being accessible and visible to the university's key stakeholders.
- Resilience and adaptability in the face of uncertainty and change, with the capability to lead CEU through its ongoing transitions and financial challenges.
- Proven ability to build and lead a cohesive senior leadership team that can effectively collaborate and drive the university forward, fostering an environment of inclusivity and shared governance.
- Experience working effectively in a complex multi-stakeholder governance structure.

### Preferred Qualifications

- Leadership experience within a university.
- Proven record of successful collaborative leadership fostering an academic environment that promotes inclusive excellence; with knowledge and a strong commitment to teaching, scholarship, research, access, interdisciplinary collaboration, and shared governance.
- Passion and demonstrated capability to advance CEU's open society mission.
- Excellent operational skills and a history of successful leadership in a complex, multi-faceted organisation, particularly in times of transition and growth.

- Demonstrated commitment to fostering freedom of speech and academic freedom while also fostering a safe and welcoming learning, living, and working environment.
- Track record of collaborative and inclusive leadership and the ability to cultivate and empower a cohesive senior leadership team.
- Demonstrated exemplary authentic, inspirational, diplomatic, and effective interpersonal and communication skills to connect with a wide range of internal and external constituencies.
- Exceptional consultation and listening skills characterised by empathy and the ability to engage with others' points of view and ideas in a thoughtful way and synthesise multiple and disparate views to define a path forward.
- As a student-centred leader, the Rector/President should engage actively with the student body, ensuring their involvement in decision-making processes and addressing their concerns with empathy and understanding.
- Familiarity with the Austrian educational landscape and local political context, with the ability to build relationships with local institutions and navigate bureaucratic processes effectively.
- Demonstrated experience in interdisciplinary and international settings, supporting CEU's identity as a globally-oriented institution with diverse academic offerings.
- Proficiency in the German language is highly preferred to facilitate local integration and collaboration.

## Leadership Qualities

In terms of the performance and personal competencies required for the position, we would highlight the following:

### Setting Strategy

- The ability to create and articulate an inspiring vision for the whole organisation.
- The inclination to seek and analyse data from a variety of sources to support decisions and to align others with CEU's overall strategy.
- An entrepreneurial and creative approach to developing new, innovative ideas that will stretch the University and push the boundaries within the sector.
- The ability to effectively balance the desire/need for broad change with an understanding of how much change the University is capable of handling, to create realistic goals and implementation plans that are achievable and successful.

### Executing for Results

- The ability to set clear and challenging goals while committing CEU to improved performance; tenacious and accountable in driving results.
- Comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty; the ability to adapt nimbly and lead others through complex situations.
- A risk-taker who seeks data and input from others to foresee possible threats or unintended circumstances from decisions; someone who takes smart risks.
- A leader who is viewed by others as having a high degree of integrity and forethought in his/her approach to making decisions; the ability to act in a transparent and consistent manner while always taking into account what is best for CEU.

### Leading Teams

- The ability to attract and recruit top talent, motivate the team, delegate effectively, celebrate diversity within the team, and manage performance; widely viewed as a strong developer of others.
- The ability to persevere in the face of challenges, and exhibit a steadfast resolve and relentless commitment to higher standards, which commands respect from followers.
- A leader who is self-reflective and aware of his/her own limitations; leads by example and drives the University's performance with an attitude of continuous improvement by being open to feedback and self-improvement.

## **Relationships and Influence**

- Naturally connects and builds strong relationships with others, demonstrating strong emotional intelligence and an ability to communicate clearly and persuasively.
- An ability to inspire trust and followership in others through compelling influence, powerful charisma, passion in his/her beliefs, and active drive. Demonstrated excellence in communication and transparency, ensuring open dialogue with students, faculty, and staff to build trust and foster a collaborative environment.
- Encourages others to share the spotlight and visibly celebrates and supports the success of the team.
- Creates a sense of purpose/meaning for the team that generates followership beyond his/her own personality and engages others to the greater purpose for the University as a whole.

## **Driving Sustainability**

- Firmly believes that both sustainability and revenue-generation are in the University's best long-term interest.
- Integrates economic, societal, and environmental factors into a purpose-driven strategy, turning sustainability into a competitive advantage.
- Understands and incorporates viewpoints from all key stakeholders to drive decision making and share the benefits.
- Delivers breakthrough innovations and business models that create value for all stakeholders, continually challenging traditional approaches.
- Sets audacious sustainability goals, driving concerted action and investments.

## How to apply

Central European University has retained Russell Reynolds Associates to advise on this appointment.

The closing date for applications is **23:59 CET on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2026**. Please submit your full application by email to [responses@russellreynolds.com](mailto:responses@russellreynolds.com) quoting reference number **2604-011BL** in the subject heading of the email. All applications will be acknowledged.

### Your submission should include:

- Your **CV**, with educational and professional qualifications and full employment history, including an explanation of any gaps in your employment history, and details where possible of budgets and numbers of people.
- A short **supporting statement** of no more than two A4 sized pages (1,000 words) explaining why this appointment interests you and how you can evidence your suitability for the role, with particular reference to the essential criteria in the 'what experience will you need' section.

An indicative timeline is shared below, please note this may be subject to change

Milestone	Date
Applications due	31 July
Longlisting	Late August/early September
Search Committee conducts first-round interviews	September
Second-round interviews conducted by Search Committee in person in Vienna	November
Finalist(s) meets with other stakeholders as appropriate	

Should you wish to speak with someone before submitting an application, please contact [responses@russellreynolds.com](mailto:responses@russellreynolds.com), quoting reference number **2604-011BL**