MINERVA

ROTHAMSTED RESEARCH

Lawes Agricultural Trust

Chief Operating Officer
Rothamsted Campus

Candidate Pack
Autumn 2026

Introduction

For over 180 years, Rothamsted has been at the forefront of agricultural science and innovation. At the heart of the Campus is a unique partnership between Rothamsted Research, Rothamsted Enterprises and the Lawes Agricultural Trust. It is a complex operation, covering scientific research, commercial opportunity and charitable objectives.

- Rothamsted Research is a world-leading agricultural research institution and has played a defining role in shaping modern, science-based agriculture;
- Rothamsted Enterprises is a business hub, partnering with commercial, agricultural and technology businesses, promoting innovation in agricultural technology;
- the Lawes Agricultural Trust supports pioneering agricultural research through the provision of land, facilities and funding for research.

The Rothamsted Campus brings together internationally renowned scientific research, commercial innovation, agricultural enterprises and charitable stewardship to address some of the world's most pressing challenges in food security, sustainability and environmental resilience.

We are now seeking to appoint an outstanding leader in the position of Chief Operating Officer (COO) for the Rothamsted Campus. Reporting directly to both the Chief Executive Officer of Rothamsted Research and to the Chair of the Lawes Agricultural Trust, the COO will be a key member of the Executive Team, working across the Campus's three constituent organisations.

The postholder will lead a broad portfolio of professional services and operational functions across the Campus, including: Estates and Facilities, Property and Asset Management, IT and Health and Safety. The new COO will ensure holistic, high-quality delivery: identifying efficiencies and supporting future growth and sustainability. This important role will lead the development and delivery of campus-wide operational, estate and infrastructure strategies, overseeing a diverse estate that includes farmland, residential accommodation and laboratories. They will need to build key relationships with a wide range of stakeholders across the entire Rothamsted Campus, delivering on organisational and cultural change.

We are seeking an accomplished and collaborative operational leader with experience of complex environments and diverse stakeholder landscapes. Candidates will bring a proven track record of leading complex operations, estates and multidisciplinary teams. They must be able to inspire their team and get the most out of the experts with whom they work. They will also have the skill to operate at all levels in the organisation, rolling up their sleeves when needed and engaging well with the Executive Team and the Board. They will have experience of delivering organisational change and driving improvement.

This is an exciting opportunity to play a pivotal role in ensuring that Rothamsted continues to deliver world-leading research and innovation for generations to come.

The History

In 1889, Lawes placed in trust his laboratory and experimental fields at the Rothamsted Estate, together with the sum of £100,000, thus creating the Lawes Agricultural Trust (LAT). His goal was to secure the future of the agricultural research that had already made Rothamsted Experimental Station (RES) famous.

The 20th century brought two World Wars and a rapidly growing urban population, and with them, mounting pressure on Britain's food supply. Government support for agricultural research grew accordingly, and LAT and RES forged close ties with the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), which later became the Agricultural Food Research Council (AFRC), and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), both of which occupied properties on the Rothamsted Estate. When AFRC consolidated its institutes in 1986, Rothamsted joined forces with Long Ashton Research Station, Broom's Barn Experimental Station, and the Unit of Insect Neurophysiology and Pharmacology at Cambridge to form the Institute of Arable Crops Research (IACR).

RES struck out as its own legal entity in 1989, operating under AFRC's wing as a public-sector research establishment. Five years later, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) emerged from the merger of AFRC with the biological science arm of the former Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC).

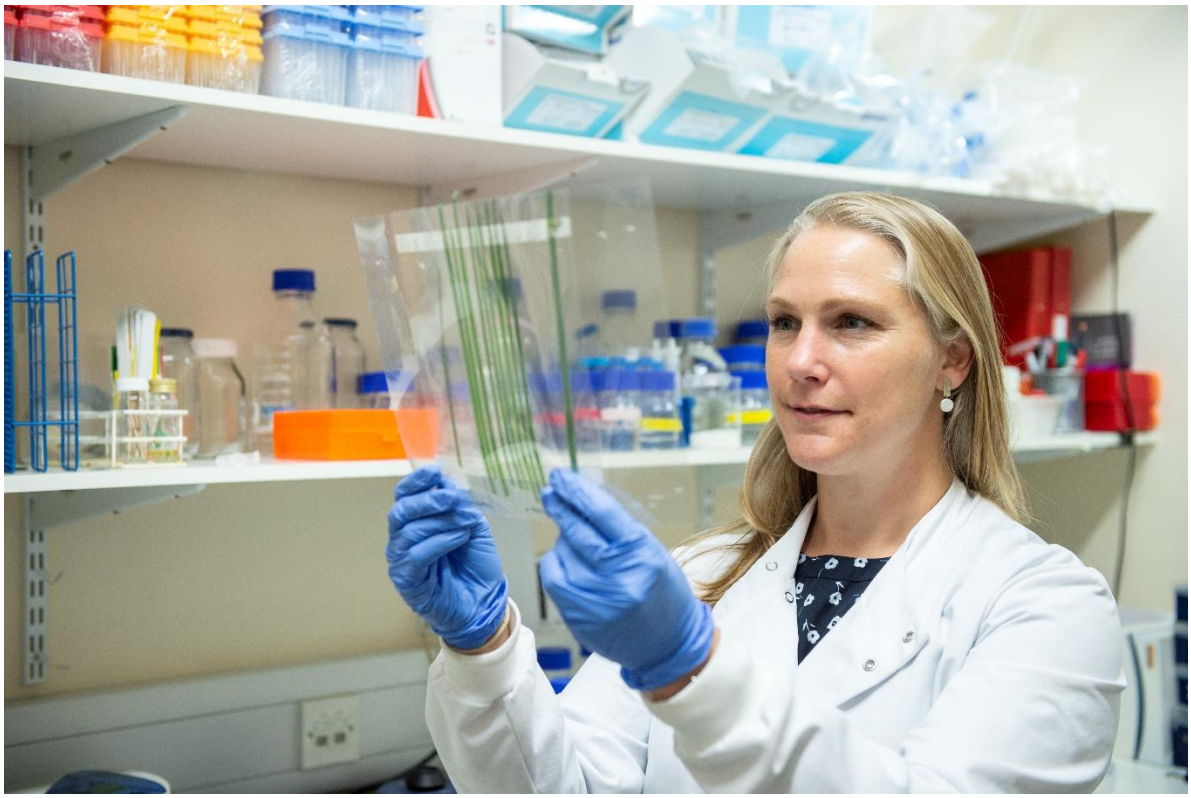
In early 2003, IACR ceased to exist as an entity and the newly restructured Institute changed its name to Rothamsted Research Ltd (RRes), including the integration of research and more than 50 scientific staff from the Long Ashton Research Station, which was closed. The story continued in 2009, when North Wyke Research joined RRes, bringing new strength in grazing-livestock systems and environmental research.

Rothamsted Research

Rothamsted Research is the longest-running agricultural research institution in the world. Its foundation dates from 1843 when John Bennet Lawes, the owner of the Rothamsted Estate, appointed Joseph Henry Gilbert, a chemist, as his scientific collaborator and planted the first of what were to become the classical Rothamsted long term experiments. The scientific partnership between Lawes and Gilbert lasted 57 years, and together they laid the foundations of modern scientific agriculture and established the principles of crop nutrition.

Lawes Agricultural Trust

The Lawes Agricultural Trust (LAT), established in 1889 by Sir John Bennet Lawes, supports original and innovative agricultural research, primarily through supporting Rothamsted Research's national and international agricultural science, by providing land, facilities, and funding. LAT, a charitable trust, owns the estates at Rothamsted, Harpenden, Herts and Broom's Barn, Suffolk, made up of land, commercial and residential buildings. LAT provides an annual research grant to the Chief Executive of Rothamsted Research, accommodation for nearly 200 people, as well as supporting over 20 commercial agricultural tenants including start-ups. LAT also makes capital grants and investments to help modernise facilities at the Rothamsted campus.



Rothamsted Enterprises

Rothamsted Enterprises is a limited company, with a focus on agritech innovation. Its mission is to ensure the Rothamsted Campus continues to thrive as a world-leading agri-food research and innovation ecosystem for businesses, investors and researchers alike. This mission is realised through the combination of physical infrastructure, business support, and access to science and investment networks.

Made up of office and lab workspace, shared research facilities, equipment rooms, a conference centre, reception facilities and an on-site restaurant, Rothamsted Enterprises provides the right environment for a collaborative ecosystem, working towards commercial growth and investment in agritech innovation.

The Estate

In Harpenden in Hertfordshire, the Trust (LAT) owns:

- The Rothamsted Estate (330 hectares) incorporating a laboratory complex comprising research and administrative buildings and facilities (7 hectares) and an extensive experimental farm on most of the rest of the area;
- 51 houses and cottages on the estate and in the town of Harpenden;
- 5 larger residential properties comprising multiple units.

The Trust also owns an experimental farm (77 ha) at Broom's Barn in Suffolk, which includes related laboratory buildings and 6 residential properties.

The BBSRC also funds North Wyke Farm Platform in Devon, which is managed by Rothamsted Research. The site, which was established in 2010, covers 63 hectares of grassland and arable land.

The Role

Reporting directly to the Chief Executive Officer of Rothamsted Research and to the Chair of the Lawes Agricultural Trust, the Chief Operating Officer is a key member of the Campus Executive Team.

The COO is responsible for leading a diverse portfolio of professional services teams across the Rothamsted Campus. The role provides strategic and operational leadership across campus-wide services, assets, and infrastructure, ensuring effective integration to support world-class scientific research, innovation, and long-term sustainability.

The COO will ensure high-performing, compliant, and financially sustainable operations across the campus, including oversight of key enabling functions and the strategic management of the campus estate and LAT asset portfolio. The role requires close collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, including Boards, BBSRC/UKRI, government, industry partners, and tenants.

The COO acts as a strategic partner to scientific leadership and the LAT Board, ensuring that operational delivery, estate management, income generation, and infrastructure investment are fully aligned with organisational priorities, funder expectations, and charitable objectives.

The role holder is expected to carry out the duties listed below, and any other duties reasonably required, commensurate with the grade and level of responsibility.

Duties

1. Strategic Leadership

- Lead the development and execution of campus-wide operations and service delivery, ensuring effective engagement of key stakeholders.
- Lead the development and execution of campus-wide operational and estate strategies, ensuring alignment with scientific, commercial, and charitable objectives.
- Provide authoritative strategic insight to the Campus Executive and respective Boards, enabling high quality strategic and operational decision making and contribution to longer-term planning and organisational performance.
- Monitor the external environment, sector trends, and regulatory changes, advising on emerging risks and opportunities.
- Lead the development and delivery of long-term strategies for the campus estate, property portfolio, and infrastructure assets.
- Lead and encourage cultural change and collaboration between the three organisations within the Rothamsted Campus.

2. Operational Management and Oversight

- Drive operational excellence across all enabling functions including Estates and Facilities, Property/Asset Management, IT, and Health and Safety.
- Provide strategic oversight of the Rothamsted campus estate, including laboratories, glasshouses, farms, long-term experiments, residential and commercial properties.
- Ensure the effective management, maintenance, utilisation, and optimisation of LAT property assets, balancing income generation, sustainability, and research needs.
- Lead major capital projects, digital transformation, estate development, refurbishment programmes, and sustainability initiatives
- Drive improvements in operational effectiveness through enhanced cross-campus collaboration and targeting efficiencies.
- Oversee risk management frameworks, business continuity and compliance across operational and estate activities.
- Ensure all operational activities comply with relevant regulatory, legal, health & safety, and environmental requirements.
- Identify opportunities for income-generating activities, in partnership with campus partners, in line with BBSRC and partner expectations.

3. Leadership of Operational Teams

- Provide strategic and operational leadership for Estates and Facilities, HR, IT, Health and Safety and property/asset management teams, ensuring they deliver high quality, efficient, and forward-looking services that enable the Campus's strategic and scientific ambitions, whilst also developing team members.
- Lead teams responsible for the management of residential and commercial property portfolios, ensuring effective tenancy arrangements, occupation, and service delivery.
- Provide strategic oversight of multi-site estates, laboratories, glasshouses, farms, long term field experiments, and national research facilities.
- Embed a culture of high performance, continuous improvement, and customer-focused service delivery across all operational and estate functions.
- Lead workforce planning, talent development, organisational change, and employee engagement strategies.
- Ensure teams provide clear, timely, and strategic insight to senior leaders, researchers, and partners.
- Support the transformation of ways of working to enable interdisciplinary research and innovation.

4. Financial Management and Income Generation

- Work closely with Finance to develop and implement business plans, budgets, and financial strategies for operational and estate functions.
- Oversee financial performance relating to estate operations, property portfolios, and capital investments.
- Support the forecasting and monitoring of income, expenditure, and cash flow related to LAT assets and campus operations.
- Drive financial sustainability and income generation, including maximising utilisation and return from estate assets.

5. Executive Collaboration and Institutional Support

- Partner with the Executive team to ensure resources are deployed effectively across the Campus.
- Act as a key advisor to scientific leadership, ensuring that operational delivery informs project planning, grant applications, funding strategies, and delivery.
- Contribute to strategic planning processes, including organisational reviews, transformation initiatives, and long-term institutional development.
- Work closely with campus partners (RRes, REL, LAT, tenants and collaborators) to ensure coordinated and effective campus utilisation

6. Governance & External Stakeholder Engagement

- Build and maintain strategic relationships with UKRI BBSRC, government bodies, industry partners, academic institutions, and local stakeholders
- Ensure high standards of governance, compliance, and regulatory adherence across operational and estate activities
- Provide assurance to Boards on risk, operational performance, asset management, and compliance
- Attend or chair internal committees as required.

Person Specification

Education/ Qualifications

Candidates should be educated to degree level with either a postgraduate qualification in a relevant area or equivalent experience operating at senior leadership level.

Experience/Knowledge/Skills

Candidates must demonstrate:

- Senior operational executive leadership in a complex research, scientific, academic or public-sector organisation with a proven track record of managing large scale operations, finances, estates, and multi-disciplinary teams.
- The ability to develop, manage and motivate teams of staff with diverse skills, including those not under their direct control. They will be able to ask the right questions and bring out the best in their teams.
- A proven track record in managing service delivery and operational effectiveness, identifying opportunities for efficiency and financial savings.
- A comprehensive knowledge of the use of information systems in the delivery of administrative services and the ability to demonstrate a creative and innovate approach to process and system improvements.
- A proven ability to motivate, negotiate, influence and network, both internally and externally with senior colleagues, scientific leaders, board members and stakeholders.
- Demonstrable experience in leading high performing teams, setting clear direction, developing talent, continuous improvement and customer-focused service.
- The ability to effectively present and communicate complex information, data or analysis to stakeholders at all levels.

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Competencies

- Strategic commercial thinking and implementation
- Innovation and problem solving
- Relating positively to others
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Leadership and management
- Developing self and others to deliver excellence
- Communicating and influencing
- Working with complexity and ambiguity

Personal qualities

- Calm and professional
- Creative, solutions-focussed and pragmatic
- Low-ego and trustworthy
- Can-do
- Flexible and resilient
- Detail-focussed

Further Information

The appointee will be expected on site for a minimum of four days per week, at least for the initial twelve months in post. There will be flexibility with this requirement in cases of extenuating circumstances. There will be the option of accommodation on campus, dependent on requirements and availability. This can be discussed in detail with shortlisted candidates.

How to Apply

Applications, which should be in the form of a CV and cover letter, should be sent to Rothamsted@minervasearch.com no later than Monday 12th October.

We are aiming to shortlist on 4 November. Informal two-way discussions will be arranged for shortlisted candidates with various stakeholders on 18 November. Formal interviews are scheduled for 24 November.