

LASER EC Candidate Biographies



Patricia Rogers

I am an educator and internationalist. I have taught – and written– in the UK, Nigeria, Pakistan and South Korea. I have been Chief Executive of the Council for Education in World Citizenship, the Pestalozzi International Village and Jubilee Debt Campaign. I have been a trustee of Chatham House (Royal Institute of International Affairs), the UNA-UK and the British Humanist Association (now Humanists UK). I have worked in mathematics education, including with the Open University and for the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics.



Peter Webster

I am chair of the Region's Policy Committee, and of Streatham & Clapham Branch. Outside UNA, I work in the field of Responsible/Ethical Investment. I have a University degree in Mathematics and an MBA. I believe UNA is an important means: for people to show their support for the UN's principles; for educating people about the UN's work; for campaigning to strengthen it; and for ensuring that our own government acts in line with international law, advances shared global goals and plays a constructive role as a UN member state and permanent member of the Security Council.



Jane Beeley

I have chaired Tunbridge Wells (latterly Tunbridge Wells & Wealden) UNA branch for over thirty years. I am a Chartered Librarian. I have always worked full-time, firstly as a children's librarian, then as a student administrator for the SE Region of the Open University, where I gained my degree. I was a governor of a designated primary school for fifteen years. I became site librarian at an H & FE college, and in my last job I ran two hospital libraries and a patients' library service for MTW NHS Trust. After retiring I joined the UNA-LASER Committee in 2014, and in January 2021 I became Secretary.



Gonzalo Alvarez

A Marine Biologist and Oceanographer, I have been part of Scientific research teams in the South Pacific (UNDP Programme) (early 1990s). I led international teams regarding coastal Community Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean (1992 – 2001). I have also been a member of eight International Human Development Forums across the world. I have numerous academic qualifications from Chile, Cambridge and London. Between 2005 and 2007 I was a Lecturer in Bioethics at Universidad del Mar, Chile. A member of Bexhill & Hastings UNA, I am currently chair of UNA Climate and Oceans, bringing together many regional NGOs, universities and government agencies to do research and raise awareness. I have been a speaker at numerous UNA branches in England – and Sweden. I am also a Committee member of UNA London and South East Region.



Neville Grant

I was for years Chair or Secretary of the Region, and also chair of Blackheath UNA. For some years I edited the print edition of the *LASER Newsletter*. I did my National Service as a soldier in Ghana, and subsequently became a teacher/trainer in Tanzania, and the University of Lagos. A sometime British Council officer, I became a professional writer of English textbooks in and for many countries, including Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Botswana, Hong Kong, and the Caribbean region. For six years I worked as a writer in China on a UNDP project, for high schools, followed by a series for University students. I have also worked as an educational consultant in Brazil, East Asia, Anglophone and Francophone Africa, and the Arab world.



Salem Mezhoud

I have experience working with the UN in Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs and Post Conflict Reconstruction, especially in North Africa and the Mediterranean. I have worked for the EU in counter-terrorism and counter-Organised Crime in the Sahel, covering Trafficking and Slavery. I am an Executive Committee member of the Westminster United Nations Association.



Catherine Pluygers

I am a musician and have always had an interest in development issues. I studied for a degree in development at Birkbeck University. I am vice-chair of UNA Wandsworth and a long-standing committee member of UNA Westminster. Currently I am chair of UNA LASER Trust and was chair of LASER from 2015-19. I have been on the executive committee of WILPF and have a particular interest in the welfare of women. Over the years I have helped deliver some very large projects for UNA, WILPF and Voices of African Women.



René Smit

I am from the Netherlands, and I came over from Amsterdam to London in 2012 to start my job as a Child Protection Social Worker in Richmond upon Thames. I am currently working as a Team Leader in the Permanency Team, which has a focus on Looked after Children. I have dealt with mental health, substance misuse and children throughout the past 13 years of my career. I have been involved in both national and EU politics. I strongly believe that the UN should play an ongoing and important role in providing mechanisms to seek to improve the life of every man, woman and child on earth.



Rob Storey

I am chair of Wandsworth UNA and a contributing member of LASER. I taught Maths in the FE and HE sectors where I was also an active trade-unionist. I taught Maths at an inner city Senior High School in Washington DC. As a County Councillor, I chaired a political group and was chair/vice chair of a number of committees. Although my teaching career revolved around Maths, a lifelong interest in Politics led me to complete a PhD on a period of Political History. I support the work of the UN; enjoy visiting places so travel is a passion.



Antony Vallyon

A member of Westminster branch, I have been representing the LASER committee on a working group on an International Court for the Environment for the last few years, I am also a member of the Academic Council for the UN system (ACUNS). After an inspirational experience working for UN University in Tokyo and at the UN Secretariat in New York in 1997 on peace, development and UN reform, I became active in UNA-USA, New Zealand and Australia. From 2007-2010 I was President of UNA-NZ and attended the triannual WFUNA Plenary, and the UN DPI/NGO conference in Paris on 60th anniversary of UDHR. For UNA-NZ I worked with UN and Government Agencies and NGOs on a number of issues, including International Development, and Disaster Relief.



David Wardrop

I am a long-time member of the L&SER committee and have chaired Westminster UNA since 2001. Over the years, we have initiated and sustained a film festival, an international law lecture, and a conference and wreath-laying ceremony to mark International UN Peacekeepers Day. In 2021, the government agreed to our proposal for the naming of United Nations Green, here in the heart of London.



Valeria Minisini

I am currently a Research and Policy Assistant at international peacebuilding charity, Conciliation Resources. I have been actively involved in UNA activities since 2016 and was elected Chair of the UNA Canterbury branch in January 2021. In 2019, I, alongside several other university students, set up the inaugural UNA Youth Platform in order to give a stronger voice to young people across the UNA umbrella. I currently act as an advisor, providing support on campaigns, fundraising and operational processes. Through my work at UNA Canterbury, I have played a key role in the organisation of two editions of the

flagship event, the Service for Peace with the most recent one held in October 2021 - managing relations with Canterbury Cathedral, publicity and logistics.

I hold a BA in Politics and International Relations, as well as an MA in International Law obtained from the University of Kent. I am particularly interested in causes such as gender, youth empowerment, climate change and peacebuilding. Outside of my busy working life, I am an avid traveller (when possible) and have had the opportunity to visit over 30 countries across Europe, Africa and Asia.



Suheil Shahryar

As an IT and cybersecurity consultant, I have been working in the financial services sector in the UK and world-wide for the last 30 years. With a degree in Astronomy from UCL and a Masters in Geophysics from Newcastle, my previous career for 15 years was that of a geophysicist working for oil companies in the UK and the Middle East. Born in Bangladesh, I have made England my home. A humanitarian and cosmopolitan at heart, I am interested in understanding and solving how human society can live and thrive sustainably and overcome the negative effects of our age, including climate change, inequality, unregulated technology and social, political and economic barriers. I am Chairman of UNA Harpenden.