



THE ARTS
SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP REPORT Spring 2026

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Our regular bi-annual membership report provides an overview of activity around the societies including lectures and volunteering projects.

The trustees and central office have also been busy, and highlights include:

- The launch of our new Support site for training, guidance and resources;
- The report of the Membership Working Group focussed on ways to sustain our society model;
- The addition of Church Recording as a fourth Volunteering arm;
- Finalising new articles of association for The Arts Society, developed by our Governance Working Group. These will be proposed for adoption at our AGM in June, taking account of feedback from the recent consultation with societies.

Work on our main website is progressing well, with testing under way, and we will be demonstrating some of its features at the AGM.

All members are welcome to our AGM, and I look forward to seeing some of you there.



Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeremy', with a long, sweeping horizontal line underneath.

Jeremy Thomas
Chair

THE ARTS SOCIETY IN NUMBERS



63,429
Society Members



76,337
subscribers to
Instant Expert



332
Societies
incl. ME &
NZ



76,252
subscribers to
Monthly Highlights



11,054
subscribers to
our Instagram



21
training
events



55,537
households
receiving the
magazine



6,863
YouTube subscribers



71
custom
design requests



1,745
Site visitors
using Find
Your Society



4,632
Facebook
followers

UPDATES FROM HEAD OFFICE

The membership working group, formed in 2025 to draw together ideas from societies to sustain our society model, has now produced its final report. The full report is recommended reading for members in any society which wishes to increase its membership or recruit new team members and can be accessed here: <https://theartsociety.org/resource/membership-reports-and-town-hall-meetings>

We are also pleased to announce the launch of our newly updated Support site. The site brings together all training materials, guidance, and resources in one place, with improved navigation to make it easier to find what you need, when you need it. It can be accessed here: <https://www.theartsocietysupport.org/>

Work on the new website is well underway, and the first two societies have come onboard to test it out and give us their feedback. We'll give a more detailed progress report at the AGM. Plus we'll explain the strategy behind the project, and describe some of the exciting new features in the pipeline.

EDUCATION

Below is information about all reviews received for events taking place in the period 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025.

Lecturers

2300 lecture reviews were received for lectures given in 2025 and the results were as follows:

Outstanding	768	33.4%
Excellent	1157	50.3%
Very Good	282	12.3%
Good	80	3.5%
Passable	7	0.3%
Poor	6	0.3%

Study Days

The number of study day reviews received was 180 and the results were as follows:

Outstanding	102	56.7%
Excellent	66	36.7%
Very Good	7	3.9%
Good	2	1.1%
Passable	1	0.6%
Poor	2	1.1%

Directory Day

2026

Directory Day 2026 was held on Thursday 5 March 2026 at Central Hall Westminster in London. 475 Society Members and 205 accredited lecturers attended the event, with 146 lecturers giving presentations throughout the day. All the presentations were filmed and added to lecturers' individual pages in the Directory shortly after the event.

2027

Directory Day 2027 will be taking place live and online in March 2027. All accredited lecturers will be invited to take part and give presentations over the two day event. As ever, all presentations will be recorded and made available for committee members to watch afterwards.

VOLUNTEERING

Statistics: Spring 2025



6

Trails of
Discovery
representatives



6

New Trails of
Discovery



13

New Arts
Volunteering
projects



11

New Heritage
Volunteering
projects

Arts Volunteering

13 new Arts Volunteering projects since last report

Arts volunteering continues across the country, with a range of projects that bring the arts to people who might otherwise have limited access, while also benefiting local communities. Many of these initiatives are supported by grants from The Arts Society.

The 2025-26 A-Level Art competition received 124 entries, with 26 shortlisted by our judges, Jeremy Thomas and Heather Leach. Our final three winners - 1st, 2nd and 3rd place - were selected through online voting. Their work showcased a diverse range of mediums, including sculpture, painting and photography. Congratulations and many thanks to all the students, schools and Societies who took part. We will be launching the 2026-27 competition very soon.

We are continuing to look for a national Head of Arts Volunteering.

Heritage Volunteering

11 new projects since last report

Over the last few years, the Heritage remit has broadened, and we are now able to look over a more extensive field to find new and interesting projects to add to the wide range that we already have.

Some good examples are: the conservation of two historic steam engines which will go to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum (probably our most inventive yet!); a project conserving the archives of a shop supplying strings for musical instruments; and the archives of long- established Cricket Clubs at Lords and Trent Bridge.

Previously we mainly dealt with conserving books, archives and textiles in large houses, churches and libraries. These will remain our most usual projects, but this expansion is proving very useful for reaching out to more volunteers.

For books, archives and more fragile artefacts, the volunteers require training from a qualified Conservator selected by The Arts Society. This training has to be completed before volunteers can start the work and is revisited at regular intervals in order to maintain a high standard.

Recent new projects include a small follow-up project to a completed project at the Civil War Museum in Newark where the volunteers will make new small flags to decorate the museum entrance. And in London a new book conservation project is in development at the Athenaeum.

Hilary Olleson
April 2026

Trails of Discovery

6 new trails since last report

Trails of Discovery continues to expand, with new trails being launched and new formats being developed. Trails are important not only for The Arts Society, helping us connect people with art and heritage in engaging, accessible ways, but also for the venues and areas where they are created, by encouraging visits, celebrating local stories, and helping people see familiar places with fresh eyes.



Children's trails

4 started,
4 completed



Memory trails

2 started,
1 completed



Neighbourhood
trails

5 started,
3 completed

Recent activity has included a new Arts Trail in Peterborough and two new children's church trails at Holy Family Roman Catholic Church in Southport and at The Church of the Good Shepherd in Edinburgh, all of which were launched at the start of 2026.

Posters with QR codes are an easy way to promote our trails and are displayed in the local area. They make trails very accessible, help advertise the trail and the local society, and allow people to download and read the trail on a mobile device, avoiding printing costs.

If you have any ideas for a trail, please do contact Pauline on trails@theartsociety.org. There are six representatives throughout the country who can help you create your trail.

Creating a trail can be great fun, something you can do with friends, while meeting new people, learning as you go, and discovering - or revisiting - new places.

Pauline Stewart
April 2026

Church Recording

Church Recording represents a legacy of volunteers' passion and dedication that stretches back over fifty years. Following the successful reintegration of the Church Recording Society CIO into The Arts Society on 28 February 2026, we are entering a vibrant new era of collaboration. This transition is a celebration of loyal volunteers and forward-thinking Trustees who have ensured that this vital work continues to flourish. By capturing the unique creative, social, and historic stories of our nation's churches, chapels, and other places of worship, we provide an invaluable service that ensures these sacred spaces are recognised and recorded for future generations. Records are used by those caring for these historic buildings, researchers, other heritage organisations, and the general public.

The future of Church Recording is bright, and there has never been a more exciting time to get involved. We are on a mission to revitalise existing groups and support the creation of new ones, aiming to return to our peak of producing over 50 records annually. Whether you are interested in researching local history, documenting exquisite craftsmanship, or being part of a friendly and committed team, your contribution will directly impact the preservation of national heritage. We invite all members to rediscover the immense rewards of this activity - help us turn the page on this new chapter by reaching out to volunteering@theartsociety.org or churchrecordingsociety@gmail.com

We will be delighted to help and support you and Church Recording guidelines and resources are now available from The Arts Society's website.

David Medcalf
April 2026

GRANTS

So far in 2026, a total of 15 Society Project Grants were awarded, supporting a diverse range of projects across our Societies. We are delighted to confirm that the Grants Committee approved funding for all of these initiatives.

Society	Title of project	Project type
Alresford	Art Exhibition Showcasing Perins School	Youth
Alton	Alton College, Scholarship for Excellence Programme	Youth
City of Chichester	Chichester Uni Fine Arts Students' Exhibition	Fine Arts students' exhibition
Gade Valley	Dacorum Young Artist	Youth
Clapham	Routes	Youth
Topsham	Heritage Conservation	Heritage
Wimbledon	Polka Invites	Arts
Southampton	Art Then! A Family Activity Day	Community
Canterbury	Adisham Primary School / Emma Johnson Music Foundation Instrument Stories Project	Youth
Wimborne & Blandford	Research on decorative frieze at Museum of East Dorset	Heritage
Stamford	HMP Stocken Art Project	Arts
West Sussex	Downscape in Vinyl	Arts
Sanderson	Landscape artist competition	Community
Teme Valley	Creating heraldic/historic shields for the Ludlow History Festival	Community
Worcester	Collaboration with Foodbank, Community Hub and The Artery	Community

Since the beginning of the year, we have issued 4 Small Society Grants, supporting Societies in genuine financial need, enabling them to continue supporting local arts, heritage, schools, and community projects.



4
Small Society
Grants given

GOVERNANCE

AGM 2026

This year's AGM will be taking place on Thursday 25 June 2026 at the Tempest Anderson Hall, Yorkshire Museum, Museum Gardens in central York, YO1 7FR. All members are invited and we do hope to see many of you at the AGM.

The day will begin with an address by our new president Hilary Kay, and the presentation of the Marsh Awards for volunteering. We will host our AGM in the afternoon with the opportunity to ask questions.

For more information on the AGM programme, including how to register to attend, please visit: <https://theartsociety.org/agm-2026>

Trustee Elections 2026

Nominations were invited for two Trustee vacancies in 2026. Nominations closed on 16 April 2026.

Four nominations were received by the deadline and the candidate information can be found on our website here: <https://theartsociety.org/resource/trustee-elections>.

Voting information has been sent directly to each Society's voting representative. Voting opened on 30 April 2026 and will close on 11 June 2026. The election results will be announced at the AGM on Thursday 25 June 2026.

Proposed changes to Articles of Association

Over the last year a group of members drawn from societies across the UK has been considering changes to the Articles of Association for The Arts Society (NADFAS). The terms of reference for the group required that no change be made to the rights of Societies, who are the sole Voting Members.

The group decided that the existing Articles have largely worked over the last 25 years, but recommended a number of changes, including to:

- update some of the text of the existing Articles, including changing the legal name of NADFAS to The Arts Society
- update the objects to make clear that we include all arts
- make some changes to the processes for election of trustees and officers,
- Make a number of other detailed amendments to remove ambiguities and streamline processes.

The proposed Articles were reviewed by our solicitors Bates Wells and approved by the Board to be circulated to societies for wider consultation. This consultation process closed on 1 May.

You can still read and download the relevant documents here:

<https://theartssociety.org/resource/consultation-2026>

The trustees are considering the result of the consultation process and expect to propose a final version of the Articles for approval by the Voting Members at the AGM on 25 June 2026.

Trustees:

Chair: Jeremy Thomas

Vice-Chair: Jo Ward

Treasurer: Trevor Walters

Tony Callender

Lesley Jones

Jack Leonard

Geri Parlby

Michael Shirley

Lucy Harvey-Scholes

FINANCE

Outturn for 2025

The audit fieldwork was completed during the second week of March and the draft performance for 2025 was a small surplus on the general fund of £16K before investment gains of £53K. The draft position across all funds was a deficit before investment gains of £178K, reflecting the cost for the restructure at Central Office necessary to align staff resource with the strategic plan, the investment in a major overhaul of the website and provide Societies with marketing materials and advertising support at both the local and national level.

After including investment gains of £123K, the net deficit was reduced to £55K.

Total draft reserves were £3.4M of which £763K were General Reserves. This equates to 6 months, in line with the reserves target.

Outlook for 2026

The Trustees have set a budget which anticipates a small deficit on the general fund for 2026. In addition, the budget provides for expenditure of £291K out of the Special Development to increase the local and national marketing support provided to Societies and to develop new entertaining and informative online content that will raise awareness of The Arts Society amongst the general public.

Planning ahead for 2027

The individual membership fee for the National Society for 2027 has been set at £17. 2027 will see us building on those approaches which have proven to be the most effective for retaining and growing our membership. At the same time, we will continue our review of costs whilst maximising member benefits and enhancing support services to Societies.

Headlines

Total Art Society Cash @31/12/2025 £582,000	General Art Society Fund Investments @31/12/2025 £585,000	Forecast General Fund Reserves @31/12/2025 £763,000
Total Art Society Loans @31/12/2025 £364,000	Total Art Society Investments @31/12/2025 £3,303,000	Draft Total Reserves @31/12/2025 £3,400,000

WHO'S WHO

at The Arts Society

Direct dial numbers for the team are shown below along with their email addresses and role title:

Ian Arnold, Chief Executive Officer - ian@theartsociety.org
Katherine Sutton, Deputy Chief Executive Officer - katherine@theartsociety.org
Dr Jenny Gimpel, Operations Manager - 020 7031 5546 / jenny@theartsociety.org
Lewis Merricks, Finance and Resources Officer - 0207 038 7593 / lewis@theartsociety.org
Isabel Cooper, Head of Marketing & Communications - 0207 038 7584 / isabel@theartsociety.org
Joseph Little, Head of Society Development - 0207 038 7589 / joseph@theartsociety.org
Lottie Tucker, Head of Creative & Strategy - 0207 082 2638 / lottie@theartsociety.org
Daniel Ward, Head of Digital - enquiries@theartsociety.org
Nicki Stapleton, Education and Volunteering Manager - 020 7038 7588 / nicki@theartsociety.org
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For more information, please visit: <https://theartsociety.org/contact-us>

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