

**Minutes of the 24th Annual General Meeting of
The National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies
(a company limited by guarantee)
Operating as "The Arts Society"**

**held at 14:00 on 16 September 2025 at
Friends House, Euston Road, London**

**Company Registration No. 4307984
Registered Charity No. 1089743
OSCR: SC039240**

1. Chair's welcome

The Chair, Jeremy Thomas, welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

The attendance list and list of apologies is held by The Arts Society.

3. Report of the Chair

The report of the Chair (Jeremy Thomas) is attached in full under Appendix A.

4. Report of the CEO

The report of the CEO (Ian Arnold) is attached in full under Appendix B.

5. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 23 August 2024

There were no amendments to the minutes.

The Chair asked the meeting to vote on approval of the minutes. The minutes were approved with no votes against.

6. Presentation of the Annual Report and audited Financial Statements of The Arts Society for the year ended 31 December 2024

The introduction to this from the Chair (Jeremy Thomas) is included in full under Appendix C.

Questions were invited and are listed below:

Question 1: Question relating to Annual Report p10 on Cultur.art, have you been able to work with the donor of the £30,000 donation to repurpose it to another area of work? How are you finding new potential donors and sponsors and their feelings on the new strategy?

Response (JT): The £30k donation was allocated to Cultur.art last year. Ian Arnold has been speaking to the donor.

Response (IA): I have been in contact with the accountants of the donor, and they have indicated another round of grant-giving is imminent. They have requested details of the work we have been doing with the funds given. There is no guarantee another grant will be received, but we have done our best to be in a position to receive one.

We have an active programme of identifying potential sponsors and travel affiliates, working with Trustee Michael Shirley. We have fully used the content by Cultur.art and have repurposed some of that video content which now appears under The Arts Society brand on our YouTube channel.

Question 2: On the Special Development Fund, how much has been spent and how much is budgeted for marketing and website development across 2025 and 2026? In the marketing expenditure, what is the projected increase in membership numbers over a specific time period balanced against this expenditure? Are there any learning points from this year?

Response (JT): We have reforecast the budget to spend £220k out of the special development fund in 2025 on marketing and website development. We will be continuing this investment in 2026 but haven't fixed the budget for that yet.

Response (IA): We are undertaking a test marketing campaign to understand outcomes against spend comparing different routes across radio, digital and traditional advertising. Following a period of testing we will expand marketing to a larger group of societies; with greater data gathering we can be more confident in understanding the return on our investment and its cost-effectiveness. We are working systematically with a small number of societies to learn and then apply learnings to a larger group.

7. To receive and adopt the report of the Trustees and Audited Financial Statements of The Arts Society for the year ended 31 December 2024

The Chair asked the meeting to vote to adopt the Financial Statement for the year ended 31 December 2024. The meeting voted in favour to adopt the accounts with no votes against. The accounts for the year ended 31 December 2024 were duly adopted.

8. To appoint Moore Kingston Smith as Auditors for the ensuing year

The Chair asked the meeting to vote to appoint the auditors. The meeting voted in favour of appointing Moore Kingston Smith as auditors for the ensuing year with no votes against. Moore Kingston Smith (Chartered Accountants) were appointed as auditors for the ensuing year.

9. To confirm the appointment of Lesley Jones as Co-Opted Trustee

The Chair asked the meeting to vote to confirm the appointment of Lesley Jones as Co-Opted Trustee. The meeting voted in favour of confirming the appointment of Lesley Jones as Co-opted Trustee with no votes against.

10. To confirm the appointment of Geri Parlby as Co-Opted Trustee

The Chair asked the meeting to vote to confirm the appointment of Geri Parlby as Co-Opted Trustee. The meeting voted in favour of confirming the appointment of Geri Parlby as Co-opted Trustee with no votes against.

11. To confirm the appointment of Tony Callender as Co-Opted Trustee

The Chair asked the meeting to vote to confirm the appointment of Tony Callender as Co-Opted Trustee. The meeting voted in favour of confirming the appointment of Tony Callender as Co-opted Trustee with no votes against.

12. To adopt the strategy of the Charity as set out in the document 'Strategy 2025' and published on the Charity's website in January 2025

The Chair asked the meeting to vote to adopt the strategy of the Charity as set out in the document 'Strategy 2025' and published on the Charity's website in January 2025. The meeting voted in favour to adopt the strategy with no votes against. The strategy was duly adopted.

13. General questions

Questions were taken from the floor.

The questions and responses are attached under Appendix D.

14. Give notice of Trustees for the year

The Chair confirmed those Trustees who had been elected to the Board as:
Trevor Walters, Lucy Harvey-Scholes.

The Chair confirmed the composition of the Trustee Board for 2025-2026 as of today:
Jeremy Thomas (Chair), Jo Ward (Vice-Chair), Jack Leonard, Michael Shirley, Tony Callender, Lesley Jones, Geri Parlby, Trevor Walters, Lucy Harvey-Scholes

15. Farewells and welcomes

The Chair took the opportunity to thank the following:

- Dianne Griffiths – Area Chair, West Mercia & South Wales
- Heather Leach – Head of Arts Volunteering

The Chair welcomed the following:

- Lynda Aldred & Heather Mizen – Area Co-Chairs, East Anglia
- David Medcalf – Head of Church Recording
- Anne Deuchar – New Societies Team

16. Closing Remarks

The Chair thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting.

17. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held in 2026 – date and venue to be determined.

Appendix A: Report of the Chair (Jeremy Thomas)

The AGM is a time for us to report on the activities and results of 2024 but also a time to look forward to 2025 and beyond.

As I look back over 2024, I'm struck by two things above all: the passion of our members for their own societies and for the work of this Charity, and the generosity with which you share your time, your expertise, and your support.

2024 was a year dominated by two issues: the proposed changes to the constitution which would have removed the majority of voting rights from the society members, and the launch of cultur.art. The constitutional debate engaged many members deeply and I know it was at times painful for those on both sides. But the debate mattered — and it was heartening to see such high participation. With an impressive 80% turnout for the key vote, you our members confirmed their strong backing for the retention of society voting rights. That decision reaffirmed our identity as a membership organisation, and our belief that the society model can flourish.

A largely new Board came into office after the August AGM, at a time of significant change, with both our Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer stepping down. It was a challenging time, and your response as members was extraordinary. We had offers of help from every direction — in finance, recruitment, employment law, communications, and governance. We also drew strength from former trustees, from our volunteer networks, and from our member societies. I want to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who stepped forward. Your commitment sustained us.

There are many names I could mention but on a personal level I would like to express my special thanks to Angela Payne, Co-Chair of our National Support team, who has for me been a constant source of knowledge and good sense and who has been very generous in giving me her time. The support we have had, has brought home to me how important our Area and National Support Teams are. I would appeal to any of you here who help to run successful societies to consider, when you move on from those roles, joining your area team to bring your experience to help the less successful societies in your area to reach the same level.

In September we had four priorities:

Our first priority to ensure that we continued to provide societies with the services that they value. Despite the inevitable uncertainty which the change of leadership caused, our head office team continued to provide the service you have come to expect. I would like to express my sincere thanks to all of them for their commitment during this difficult period.

And I would like to make special mention of James Wilkins, our Membership Director, who so sadly passed away last month after a period of illness. James was the one person I knew at head office and for me the rock on which the Society was based. His loyalty was to The Arts Society, the local societies and the members, and he went out of his way to help us new trustees as we grappled with the issues we faced. A model of efficiency, he was known for his helpfulness to everyone. In short he was a lovely man. He will be sorely missed.

We want to create a lasting tribute to James. He did so much for the members and the societies and I can announce that we will be inaugurating the James Wilkins award. This will be given annually to the Society that has done most to retain and recruit members during the year. We will share further details of this in due course.

Our second priority was to rebuild trust with the societies – through open and transparent communication and by reaching out to those who took the other side during the constitutional debate. I believe we have made progress here, and I think we have proved that there is much more that unites us than divides us, but we also recognise that we need to continue to work hard at this.

Third: we had to devise a new strategy for The Arts Society to meet the challenges that we face. An important question for the strategy was the future of cultur.art. This was launched in Spring 2024 as an on-line product on a number of different platforms to engage, and thus to bring arts education to, a younger online audience.

In The Arts Society Studio, responsible for cultur.art, we had a young and talented team who produced some great content appropriate to the target audience. What we had to consider though was whether the business plan was viable. Although The Arts Society had decided to provide initial funding, the intention was for it to generate income, primarily through donations, grants and subscriptions, that would not only cover its own costs but contribute to our central overheads.

Sadly, the product had no synergy with the existing Arts Society model, and had been launched into a market with longer established competitors with greater following. The revenue figures were falling well short of expectations and we concluded that continued funding of it would not be a prudent use of charitable resources.

In January this year, we were able to share a new strategy to take the Charity forward. It builds on our proven society model. The strategic aim is to increase our membership as that enables us to continue to provide and expand our services to help societies and meet our charitable objects at an acceptable cost.

I said last year that the decline in membership over the last few years was largely induced by the pandemic and I am pleased to be able to say that membership numbers have now stabilised and even edged up. That gives us a good platform to work on.

The specific actions proposed are grouped into four pillars and the first is marketing which will be key to our success. This involves both centrally driven marketing and also improving the tools we give to societies to help with their own marketing efforts. We call it joined up marketing because every stage of the process from first engaging with new people to them joining as members needs to work and this in particular involves a major upgrade to our website. Ian will be saying more about this in his report.

The second is improving the digital and other support we give to societies. We know one of the major challenges societies face is in recruiting team members and we want to see how we can make the tasks easier. This is a particular focus of our two working groups, involving volunteers from societies, looking respectively at website needs and membership issues generally. Both working groups will be reporting in the autumn.

The third pillar is fostering a co-operative approach. For most of you, your heart lies in your own society. Each society is independent but we are part of a larger movement, and we stand or fall together. Success is not measured by the numbers on our waiting lists but by the numbers who become, and remain as, members. I have been encouraged from my visits to area meetings and to individual societies to see this being recognised and to see societies increasingly working together sharing ideas, resources and opportunities. A process which is facilitated by our Area teams.

And the fourth pillar is responsible governance and prudent use of resources. Our governance working group has concluded that we do not need to make major changes to our constitution. Some more modest proposals will be the subject of full consultation before being put to the vote at next year's AGM.

Prudent use of our resources means looking carefully at our everyday costs which are met out of the membership affiliation fee and we have reduced these. It also means using the surplus, realised from the sale of the head office premises at Guilford Street in 2023, to fund initiatives which will have a lasting benefit for the Society.

More details of the strategy are included in the Trustee's report and you will have a chance in the advisory resolution later to tell us whether you support it.

Change is not always welcome. And not all change is progress but sometimes change can be both necessary and positive. You will see changes in the months and years ahead as we implement the strategy, taking advantage of new technology, and finding new ways to support societies, as well as some necessary steps to tighten up our compliance with data protection legislation and to make our IT systems more robust.

In the Annual Report we mention the many ways we already use digital technology and in addition we know some societies have had success with their own provision of online lectures, and we applaud and encourage that, whilst recognising that it is not for all societies.

At the heart of our offering will remain the stimulating talks from our panel of expert arts lecturers. The importance of these being primarily in person is increasingly recognised for the social benefits that come from bringing people together with a common interest in the arts. It also leads on to our members engaging in our volunteering activities, protecting and conserving our cultural heritage and advancement of the arts through community projects and in schools, as well as supporting local arts charities. We have three volunteering arms: Arts Volunteering, Heritage Volunteering and Trails of Discovery all of which we saw recognised in the Marsh Awards this morning.

Until a few years ago we had a fourth arm, Church Recording, which had a long and distinguished history with The Arts Society until it was discontinued for what I might call operational reasons. The volunteers have kept the activity alive by forming the Church Recording Society. I am delighted to announce that, following some very straightforward discussions, that Society will now be combining with us, and Church Recording will once again become an official activity of The Arts Society. David Medcalf, Chair of the Church Recording Society, will be the Head of this volunteering arm.

I said we had four priorities at the outset last year. The fourth, which we could only start on when we had decided the strategy, was to bring in new leadership. We have been fortunate to have been able to appoint Ian Arnold as Chief Executive. He brings with him a wealth of expertise, particularly in marketing — a strength that will serve us well as we look to broaden our reach. Ian has put flesh on the bones of our strategy. He has also reorganised head office and redefined many roles. Change can be unsettling but Ian has empowered the head office team to contribute to development and delivery of the strategy and I have been impressed by the enthusiasm and creativity that they have shown.

We also engaged John Speed and his firm JS2 as our accountants to provide expert financial management. JS2 specialises in providing these services to charities and they have brought a welcome discipline to our financial reporting and budgeting, as well as great insight into many of the challenges we face.

And we are delighted that Hilary Kay has become our President. Hilary has taken on the role with energy and commitment, and she will be a powerful ambassador in making The Arts Society better known.

I would like to end by thanking my fellow trustees, who have worked hard to develop and explain our plans and who continue to support the executive in their own areas of expertise, our volunteers on the Area and National Support teams, the Heads of Volunteering, and the paid and voluntary staff on the head office team who maintained their usual exemplary service to members throughout the year and who have very much embraced the new strategy.

Together, we've come through a year of challenge and change with renewed strength and clarity of purpose. We have further challenges ahead, but I believe there is enormous potential not only to make what we offer more attractive and effective, but also to grow the society back to, and beyond, our former numbers. With your support, and the commitment from head office, I am confident we can do that.

Appendix B: Report of the CEO (Ian Arnold)

It would be fair to say, that this time last year, The Arts Society was going through a challenging period in its history. The new Trustee Board came in with a strong belief in the continuing relevance of the society model and were aware of the need to re-unite the membership, to develop a new strategic vision for the Society and to recruit the right senior leadership to deliver that. That was no small task.

They knew that if they were to address the decline in membership following Covid and ensure support for Societies and lecturers, marketing and advertising would play an important role in achieving those objectives. To that end, they sought a CEO with the necessary expertise, and I joined the team at the end of last year.

However, I must confess that my career with The Arts Society could have ended before it had started. In the first month, during a well-attended meeting, I was asked a potentially career limiting question by one of our members. A question that on the face of it seemed simple and innocuous but was incredibly pertinent and my answer would likely speak volumes about my commitment and indicate the future direction of the organisation. That question was:

“Are you a member of a Society?”

I can confirm that my answer was, yes.

The last AGM was certainly memorable. I wasn't there but while watching a recording of it, I noted that two members addressed very significant questions, to my predecessor. Like the Society membership question asked of me, both questions from the floor were designed to not only elicit information but to also direct executive attention to key areas of concern as seen from the perspective of the membership. Paraphrased, the questions were:

“Regarding Cultur.art, what progress has been made so far - including securing external funding?”

“Compared to NADFAS, The Arts Society is relatively unknown – where is the promotion and support?”

These were excellent questions, chosen carefully. They indicate clearly where the membership believes Head Office should be focusing and suggests what needs to be done should the answers to the questions prove to be less than satisfactory.

The membership is therefore an invaluable repository of knowledge and a source of guidance for Head Office. If we are to successfully implement the Trustee's strategy, Head Office must work in unison with the Board **and** engage with the membership *proactively*. I therefore welcome questions and constructive feedback as it informs our thinking and assists in the effective deployment of resources, on your behalf.

I'm responsible for creating the environment necessary for the success of others. It is essential that the team at Head Office can make full use of their knowledge and experience. In addition, Head Office needs to leverage the energy, expertise and unwavering commitment of the many, many volunteer-members that contribute so much to the development of the Society through a multitude of innovative initiatives and creative solutions.

Head Office is NOT here to dictate or take the organisation in a direction that risks failing Societies, alienating lecturers or undermining what is important to the membership. We are certainly not here to implement our own agenda. 'Change' does not always equate to progress.

That said, I make no apology for wanting to return The Arts Society to its rightful place and everything we do should be to the highest standards if we are to achieve this objective. This is NOT elitism, however. It is being clear about what we stand for, what we achieve and what is important to us. It is about differentiating our Society from other organisations by highlighting the work of the Charity here in the UK and abroad *as well as* promoting the many benefits of membership. Indeed, this is something that magazine advertisers, travel affiliates and sponsors expect if they are to feel confident aligning their organisations with ours and providing significant financial support in return.

Head Office has pledged its support to the Society Model. We have reconnected with Area Chairs – those key individuals who facilitate open and direct communication between the Societies in their areas and Head Office. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of them, and chairs of the National Support Team, personally, for their expert guidance and contributions over the months since I joined.

We have sought to rebuild trust with the Lecturers through Town Hall meetings and are developing new opportunities for them to capitalise on their expertise. Jeremy has already mentioned that we have reconnected with the Church Recording Society since many of their membership are Society members and they resume their rightful place along with our other Volunteer Teams whose members do so much amazing work in the wider community.

Returning to the two questions posed from the floor of the last AGM on Cultur.art and the promotion of The Arts Society, well, there have been a number of significant developments over the past year.

Cultur.art was closed in January of this year. This was necessary because the expected external funding simply did not materialise, it did not promote The Arts Society or directly benefit our membership.

To be fair to the previous senior management, there was, at its core, a rationale for the approach they took with Cultur.art. It recognised that we live in an age where the means of promoting the Arts has diversified, the ways of reaching new audiences has changed and there exists a need to develop a wider range of products and services to meet a broadening set of member and potential member expectations.

Unfortunately, with the lack of external funding, difficulty converting their audience to a paying membership and competing with more established organisations online, cultur.art was struggling. Following detailed evaluation, the Trustees concluded it had to close despite knowing that members of the creative team associated with the project would be made redundant. This was incredibly unpleasant, but I believe essential for the future security of the Society.

But, there was a positive legacy. We were able to retain some of the team and redirect their creative talents to benefit the Art Society, directly.

This brings me nicely to addressing the second question around the need to actively support and promote The Arts Society. The remaining members of the creative team would now play a central role within a new and integrated marketing strategy.

For a start the creative team filmed Society life at a number of Societies to produce our new corporate video. In **just three months** it has been viewed nearly thirteen-thousand times. It is not designed to tell the whole story but rather focuses on the core benefits of becoming a Society member, particularly the friendship, the volunteering and the enjoyment to be derived from so many thought-provoking lectures. Here is a short clip for those who have not seen it.

Video 1 SHORT CLIP FROM CORPORATE VIDEO.

At the same time, Head Office has been working with Societies to create and test, innovative approaches designed to attract new members using both traditional and digital advertising.

To ensure that resources were not wasted, the plan was to undertake a series of marketing tests, refining our approach as we proceeded and then extend the scope of our marketing activity over time.

Our first test was a campaign produced in-house to promote The Arts Society Greenwich. It proved to be more successful than planned and Greenwich had to increase the number of free tickets made available to potential members to meet demand. The current membership of Greenwich was also quick to take full advantage of other high-quality marketing materials available which are designed to encourage their friends and neighbours to visit the Society and enjoy a lecture.

But the most important component of success was the commitment of the Greenwich Committee itself to the test. Committee member Chris Ward, a former Trustee of The Arts Society, worked closely with Head Office to refine the strategy right down to ensuring that potential members were greeted warmly at the door to the lecture and making everyone feel really welcome throughout.

We are currently extending this test marketing programme across other Societies as we refine our approach still further. We will be focusing initially on Societies with significant capacity to increase their numbers and those that are especially keen to grow their membership. The test campaigns are being funded from Head Office.

We inherited a main Society website that did little to support the attraction of new members and does not meet today's digital standards for websites. It is difficult to use and the information contained badly needs updating, in places. Consequently, we are investing in an extensive and much needed overhaul. This is an enormous project and will take time to complete but we have been able to make some minor improvements already so that potential members are able to register their interest in joining The Arts Society and can find their local society via an interactive map.

As well as the localised advertising which supports individual Societies, last month our new five-week national radio campaign broke on Boom Radio. The station appeals to lovers of music from the 50's 60's 70's and 80's – exactly the demographic most likely to join and support their local Society. The commercials, which focus on the benefits of membership, have already motivated many potential members from both the UK and abroad to register their interest in joining and their details will be passed on to their nearest Society, based on their postcode. Although the campaign is still running, initial results are such that we are likely to repeat this support.

Video 2: Graphic display of sound level for COMMERCIAL No.1

We are creating new ways for people to enjoy the arts through The Arts Society.

Art Takes is a growing series of short, informative Arts videos which can be accessed via The Arts Society YouTube channel and is available free to members and potential members alike. Some are repurposed and rebranded Cultur.art videos but many are entirely new with titles such as *The Art that wouldn't Die*, *The paintings that watch you back* and *Secrets of the Sistine Chapel*. It is not surprising therefore, that these have been watched several thousand times already and are a great way to raise awareness of The Arts Society across the UK and internationally.

Video 3 Art Takes

Receiving The Arts Society magazine continues to be a valued membership benefit. Its consistent high

quality of editorial has seen it nominated for yet another award. In our next issue we feature a recipient of one of our many grants who creates beautiful classical guitars. As a means to promote our grant giving work to a wider public audience **and** link our magazine and YouTube channel resources, the creative team filmed the recipient of the grant, in his studio.

The result was a video entitled *By hand – The Art of Classical guitar making*. We plan further videos that will raise the awareness of the phenomenal work of the Society across grants and volunteering including heritage preservation. The following clip will give you a flavour of the video

Video 4 Clip from *BY HAND - The art of classical guitar making*

I am *genuinely* delighted to announce the creation of a new series of video podcasts or vodcasts entitled *Artfully Said*. These carefully designed and expertly produced vodcasts achieve two important objectives.

Firstly, they will be an essential element of our online marketing, drawing in potential members by providing original and thought-provoking discussions on the arts for them to enjoy. Secondly, they will be made available to all members, without charge, providing yet another compelling reason to be with The Arts Society.

Produced entirely by our creative team at Head Office, the vodcasts showcase our lecturers and their Arts-expert guests whilst, at the same time, promoting The Arts Society as an educational organisation. In the next clip you can see Broadcaster **Steve King** and Fashion Historian and Curator **Scott Shavonee** discussing the relationship between 1970s music and fashion in a video entitled "*How the Dancefloor became a runway, Music and Fashion in the 70's.*"

Video 5 VODCAST CLIP

I am certain that you will enjoy this series with the first vodcast available to view next month on The Arts Society YouTube channel.

So, to conclude, our answers to those difficult questions posed last year, are different now. That said, it has not been easy getting to this point. Members have had to overcome feelings of division and disillusionment, the Trustees have worked incredibly hard as have many, many of the members in a vast number of voluntary roles across the Society. At Head Office we have seen departures, closures, redundancies, and the tragic passing of James Wilkins our Membership Director after nearly 23 years with the Society. But the team have re-structured and re-grouped, we have never been more committed and appreciate fully the fact that we retain the support and contribution of so many members all of whom passionately believe The Arts Society is something unique, much loved and unites us all in the Arts - as you will see from our last clip.

Video 6 AGM MEMBERS VIDEO.

Thank you.

Appendix C: Introduction to the Annual Report from the Chair (Jeremy Thomas)

We now present to you our report and accounts for the year ended 31 December 2024.

The Annual Report contains more detail of the strategy and our plans for the future, which have been covered earlier in reports from Ian and me.

We also report on operations including:

- our membership numbers and training,
- education, where once again I am pleased to say we continue to show excellent ratings for our lectures and study days – but could I add to Katherine's perennial plea to please ensure you do fill out the lecture reports so that we have a complete picture, and particularly so that she can address any problems; and also
- Communications, mentioning two new regular features in the magazine Our Special Places and Our Local Treasure which I hope you have enjoyed.

There is a section on governance and management which makes good bedtime reading.

Most importantly there is a large section on grants and volunteering, where we recognise not only the Marsh Award winners but also just some of the many other volunteering projects which have taken place amongst the societies. Some of the projects are complex and time consuming and some are quite simple, but they all make a difference in their communities, and I hope will be an inspiration to even more societies and members to get involved in volunteering.

Turning to the accounts: the overall picture is our expenditure exceeded our income by £516k, but investment gains reduced the deficit to £287k. Our closing net funds at December 2024 were £3,478k. This is I think a satisfactorily robust position but we do need to use those net funds prudently.

Charity accounts are quite complex and we break down our funds into different categories, primarily our general funds and certain discretionary funds which represent amounts allocated by the trustees for specific purposes, and I want to focus on 3 funds.

First the general fund. Into this goes the membership affiliation fees you pay and the income we receive from commercial affiliates and from advertising. The expenditure is then largely the cost of support we provide to societies. Our aim is to keep the income and expenditure in balance and for 2024 there was a small deficit of £23k, before investment gains turned that into a small surplus. The closing balance of £693k represents about 6 months' worth of our expenditure on charitable activities which is where we want to be – and I imagine is similar to the level of reserves that you as societies like to maintain.

Second the Special Development Fund. This was formed in 2023 out of the proceeds from the sale of the Guilford Street premises. The initial intention was to hold these funds to purchase alternative premises. However, the previous management decided that the use of shared office was a more efficient use of resources. Although lacking the prestige of our own offices, the cost is less than the maintenance cost on the old premises and the arrangement is popular with staff. So we have no plans to acquire new offices.

In 2024 we spent £566k out of the SDF including £302k on the running costs of cultur.art, £150k on settlement payments to departing staff and £114k on exceptional legal fees.

The closing balance was £2,198k. We do intend to use this for investment in support of our strategic

aim of increasing membership. We will be spending money this year on marketing and a major overhaul of both the structure and content of the website.

Third is the Patricia Fay Memorial Fund which is the source of the grants we make – both the major grants and the community grants.

The income for this fund comes from gift aid, donations and bequests, and investment income.

In recent years, including 2024 our grant giving has exceeded our natural income. That cannot continue indefinitely and we have advised you of proposals to modify our grant giving, including ending most community grants.

In 2024 we did benefit from two particularly generous bequests and the trustees also transferred back to the Patricia Fay fund £107k that had been transferred out in 2023. Consequently the closing surplus in the fund at December 2024 was £297k.

I do need to emphasise that this is the surplus in the fund. There were liabilities, representing deposits from societies of £365k but assets of £662k. So I would encourage societies to continue depositing their surplus funds with the Patricia Fay Fund, as the return we earn from that goes into the amount we can give as grants.

We do intend to use the surplus for the purpose for which it is intended – to make grants – and depending on any more bequests, we do expect that surplus to fall this year, but it will never drop to zero. And we have adopted a funding model which ensures we can continue to maintain a consistent level of grants over the next few years whilst we work on initiatives to increase the income here and sustain our grant giving in the longer term.

Appendix D: Questions from the floor

Question 1: Given the renewed emphasis on the society membership model, should the term 'Head Office' be changed to 'Secretariat'?

Response (JT): We'll consider the possibility.

Question 2: It can be difficult to find affordable venues for larger audiences, and hybrid meetings on Zoom can ensure events are accessible for people who may find it difficult to travel or are immunocompromised. Will The Arts Society continue to promote online as well as in-person lectures, to ensure lectures are inclusive?

Response (JT): We recognise the importance of using Zoom while understanding that not all societies are technically set up to manage online audiences. We are also considering whether online lectures can be offered from Head Office for societies unable to offer Zoom options, to remain inclusive.

Response (IA): This is one of the reasons we are producing the video podcasts, so less mobile audiences can participate via our YouTube channel.

Question 3: You said you will be supporting members who can't attend in person by offering the video podcasts, will these be available for members only? Will these compete with local society lectures?

Response (IA): The purpose of the video podcasts is to get non-members to engage with us, and they will also be made available to members on our YouTube channel. We are thinking about creating lectures at Head Office, not to undermine the activities of local societies but to support societies unable to offer online events themselves so they can provide this option to their members.

Question 4: Are there any particular skills the Board is in need of?

Response (JT): When we invited candidates to put themselves forward, we emphasised financial management experience as something we were seeking and this will be filled.

Question 5: For local societies who need promotional content, can we make use of the content being created by Head Office?

Response (IA): Yes, we can make content available for societies, such as short clips or 'tasters' for social media channels that can drive potential members to our website to find their nearest society.

Question/Comment 6: If Zoom costs money, alternatives such as Teams can be considered.

Question 7: Will local societies be able to link back to central content, with links working both ways between local and main office sites/channels?

Response (IA): Yes, we can make links available.

Question 8: What monitoring has been built into the delivery of the new strategy?

Response (IA): We will be using a range of metrics to measure our marketing activities, including how many people are engaging with the podcasts or registering on our website. We are also seeking feedback via the Area Chairs and societies. We're producing bespoke advertising for geographical regions to test how effective it is and then refining the marketing strategy as we go along.

Question/Comment 9 (From Rachel Fay): As the daughter of the founder, I thought members may be interested in the fact that The Duchess of Kent was the first Royal Patron and attended the inaugural meeting of NADFAS which took place at the V&A Museum.

Question 10: Is there a means of communications where local societies can share information on what they're doing with Head Office and with each other, along with communications with Trustees?

Response (JT): Communications is key, but when we asked societies whether they wanted a formal consultation they said this had already been done. Trustees continue to attend Area meetings to listen and get feedback from societies, along with receiving information and feedback from Area Chairs. It is so important that societies do go to Area meetings.

Response (IA): As soon as I joined, I spent time meeting with Area Chairs individually as well as in fora. I recommend societies liaise with their Area Chairs who will raise issues and requests with us.

Question 11: With a new President who is well regarded with high visibility, might we see more of her on radio and television or in our advertising to reach a wider audience of potential members?

Response (IA): We have been discussing with Hilary Kay how to make best use of her public profile to increase the profile of The Arts Society.

Question 12: In terms of the demographic groups we are trying to reach, how are we ensuring we increase diversity and inclusivity in attracting new members?

Question 13: The Arts Society still feels Southern-centric, how can we incentivise Northern members to travel to London for courses and events?

Response to two questions (JT): We are considering ways to attract a wider pool of members but are currently targeting the demographics most likely to join us to ensure we are making best use of our marketing resources. The idea of incentivisation is a good one. We are considering holding events outside of London.

Response (IA): We are currently running a Google ad campaign which reaches a wide audience, where anyone can respond to one of our Google ads or join their local society. Our corporate video reflects the breadth of our membership and it's important we are open and honest about who we are. It's equally important for local societies to welcome new members from all backgrounds.

Question 14: Could we provide membership cards again to enable members to secure discounts?

Question 15: What is happening with digital-only membership?

Response (JT): We are looking at our digital offering but as an adjunct to local societies, rather than in competition with them.

Question/Comment 16: Can we make more use of affiliate partners? Riviera Travel pay a commission to a local society if a member goes on one of their cruises.

Question/Comment 17: Can we capitalise on the Zoom access scheme to enable more members to take advantage of hybrid events across the country, especially those for whom travel is difficult?

Question 18: To increase our appeal to communities that are not traditionally Arts Society members can we invite more lecturers with expertise in that community? If we increase our lecturer pool with experts from different communities, we could approach local communities to invite them to specialist lectures on their culture.

Response (JT): That is a very good idea.

Response (IA): The vodcasts will feature lecturers and other art experts so could be used a vehicle to reach out to communities and areas in the arts that have traditionally been less well covered.

Question 19: A number of local societies use the same website provider. Would we be able to share links between these society websites and the main website?

Response (IA): The website is under review by the Working Group led by Trustee Tony Callender

Response (TC): We're looking at a range of things we need for our new website. We are in communication with the developer who hosts some local society websites. In the long term, we hope to provide webpages for local societies through our web service. There may be a risk for local societies dependent on a lone provider; should the provider's services cease this would make societies vulnerable to losing their websites.

Question 20: How is the digital content being produced reaching people who don't know anything about The Arts Society?

Response (IA): People will come across our content while searching for arts-related subjects on the internet. Our content will be promoted to people who don't know about us – that is the purpose of our marketing campaign.