



EDUCATION - VOLUNTEERING - GRANTS - COMMUNITY

STRATEGY 2025

OUR VISION

Arts for All - Arts for Life

The belief that the arts have the potential to enrich people's lives is at the heart of everything we do.

BACKGROUND TO THE NEW STRATEGY

The health and economic benefits of engagement with culture and heritage through attendance and participation are being increasingly recognised, as exemplified in the report on Culture and Heritage Capital commissioned, and published in November 2024, by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. So, our Society model of arts lectures, volunteering projects (Arts Volunteering, Heritage Volunteering and Trails of Discovery) and the promotion of the arts in the local community - all in a welcoming and sociable environment including events and trips - is more relevant than ever.

The reduction in the number of our members during and after the pandemic has had a negative impact, not only on the income of individual societies, but also on the size of the pool from which they can draw the volunteers who are essential to the running of the societies. A further reduction in numbers would result in either cuts to central services or an unacceptable rise in the membership affiliation fee. Increasing the size of the membership has to be our priority.

We know that the fall in numbers was largely induced by the pandemic. We also know that many individual societies are increasing their memberships and some have waiting lists. But our name recognition is poor, and it is often said that The Arts Society is one of Britain's (and in some places Europe's) best kept secrets. That needs to change. It is clear that there is a large potential market that we need to be smarter at reaching, by engaging digitally with our target audience. This will involve initiatives by member societies, with the support of the head office team, but also action by the head office team directly.

We are fortunate to have realised a substantial surplus from the sale of our headquarters building at Guilford Street in London. Our current location in shared office space not only promotes better team working but costs less than running the former premises. So we have no need to purchase new accommodation and can invest the surplus in the future of the Society. **We will therefore invest in a single brand “The Arts Society”, targeting the audiences that are most likely to engage.** We will modernise, particularly in the digital area, and we will build on our strengths.

CHARITABLE OBJECTS

The Arts Society is an association of societies in the UK and internationally and is controlled by those societies. This control is exercised through the election of trustees and voting on resolutions in general meetings. It is also a charity and the trustees must ensure the Society acts in pursuit of its charitable objects, for the public benefit. These objects are set out in detail in our articles but may be summarised as:

- arts education
- conservation of artistic heritage
- advancement of the arts - which we do particularly through grants and volunteering projects.

We deliver our objects primarily, although not exclusively, through our local society members, and supporting both existing and new societies to do this falls clearly within our charitable objects.

STRATEGIC AIM

Our strategic aim is very simple: to increase membership numbers.

Not only does this, of itself, help fulfil our vision of Arts for All, it will also generate the funds we need to support our volunteering and grants programmes, ensure we can maintain our high quality services to societies, increase the pool of volunteers who are so essential to our work, and provide more opportunities for our expert lecturers.

That single aim does not mean a narrow focus to our activities. We know that increasing membership requires us to provide - and to help societies to provide - what both existing and new members want. Nor will it be solely an inward focus. We will be engaging with the vast untapped potential audience, and we will speak out on issues affecting the arts where we have something to say and where that is an effective use of our resources.

Hitherto the Society has grown and renewed itself mainly by word of mouth. With a more professional approach we can regain and surpass our previous numbers, providing more opportunities to engage with the arts for all our stakeholders.

SPECIFIC PLANS

Joined-Up Marketing

This will be key to our success.

Our intention is to raise the profile of the Society by increasing awareness of our unique access to the stimulating world of art, our charitable activities and key membership benefits. We will be targeting our core demographic - those in the 50- to 65-year-old age group. This is the group most likely to respond positively, join our societies and provide the best return on our marketing investment.

To do this we plan to deploy the creative team from The Arts Society Studio to work with societies to capture engaging video content from events and volunteering activities. This will be used in press releases, magazine articles, on the website and viewed via social media platforms. The Studio will also proactively produce and seek out new content for use in our digital marketing campaign as well as investing in our lecturers' expertise for topic selection and content production. Since we can measure which topics and which media generate the most positive response, we can direct future funds appropriately and ensure that our marketing becomes increasingly cost-effective over time.

It is through all this content that we can guide a prospective member towards our website and motivate them to apply to a local society. We intend to significantly improve the website to facilitate this process. This joined-up approach to marketing will benefit all societies, but especially those societies or Areas that can involve the Studio team in the planning and production of our content.

In addition, we will:

- provide central assistance in marketing to local societies and provide them with better tools for their own marketing efforts, and seek to improve the sharing of ideas that work at a local level.
- seek strategic partnerships with other arts and membership organisations where we can benefit each other.

- seek to engage with organisations that run pre-retirement programs to publicise what we can offer to their employees.
- consider our own sponsorship of other media which can reach target audiences in a cost-effective way.
- review the content and distribution of the magazine to ensure this is a cost-effective marketing tool as well as a benefit valued by members.

Digital and other support to societies

We are proud of the support our head office team provides to societies, but we will adopt a policy for continuous improvement, particularly in the digital area.

So we will:

- re-assess the website user needs and structure to satisfy the requirements of societies, potential members, Areas, volunteers, staff and the lecturer community.
- redevelop our website into an integrated portal for promoting membership, accessing administrative processes, providing training, arts education, marketing and promotional opportunities.
- review societies' own website needs, and consider whether we can cost-effectively improve the head office provision, or recommend third party suppliers.
- value the volunteer support teams and ensure all societies can access support when they need it.
- place a new emphasis on identifying underserved locations and facilitate the formation of new societies.
- maintain the quality of services provided by the head office team.

Fostering a co-operative approach

Whilst each society is independent, we all benefit from working together to increase overall membership, and to provide joint activities which individual societies cannot support on their own.

We will:

- provide an appropriate mix of ‘in person’ and digital communications and activities with societies, members and lecturers, seeking openness and the two way exchange of views.
- maintain the right balance between centralisation and local society determination and between London based and regional activities. Encourage innovation in meeting arrangements, increased local cooperation with sharing of resources, and the organisation of joint and Area wide activities.
- be responsive, at both central and Area levels, to the expressed support needs of societies. To provide structures, resources and facilities which provide value for money and promote innovation and shared learning.
- support and promote the many different volunteering activities, and ensure our grant giving both meets our charitable objects and helps to promote The Arts Society.
- maintain and enhance our directory of lecturers; valuing their contribution and engaging them in ways which contribute further to achieving our objects and strategic aims.

Prudent governance and financial planning

We have already introduced more robust financial management by outsourcing the finance function and we will:

- use the Special Development Fund prudently to finance our marketing activities and other improvements, such as to the website, and seeding new societies, all of which will provide a lasting return on the investment. An increased membership base

will enable us to maintain marketing activities in the longer term, as the Fund runs down, without increasing the *per capita* cost to the societies.

- ensure the Patricia Fay Memorial Fund is used exclusively for grant giving.
- continually review our use of ‘in-house’ and external providers to ensure effectiveness, quality and value for money.
- improve financial controls and avoid unnecessary costs.
- seek appropriate commercial sponsorship of certain of our activities.
- update our articles and trustee recruitment methods to ensure we have the right board composition and skills, whilst always respecting societies’ voting rights.

TARGETS AND TIMESCALES

As we make more detailed plans to implement our strategy, and roll out the initiatives, we will be sharing with members our specific targets and timescales.

REVIEW

The strategy will be subject to periodic review, to respond to changes in the environment, the requirements of societies, and experience of what works.

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