

RA

Royal Academy of Arts

Candidate Pack for Chief
Operating Officer



Burlington House

Welcome

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in joining the Royal Academy of Arts as our Chief Operating Officer. This is a pivotal moment for the Royal Academy of Arts, as we strengthen our foundations and position the RA for the next chapter of sustainable growth and creative excellence.

Having recently joined the Academy myself, I am both energised and inspired by the opportunity to lead this remarkable and much-loved institution alongside a talented, ambitious, and entrepreneurial senior team. The RA is unique: artist-led, independent, and steeped in more than 250 years of excellence in the creation, display, and understanding of art and architecture. Yet we are equally forward-looking - determined to reimagine how we operate, deepen our engagement with audiences, and ensure our extraordinary estate and resources are used to their fullest potential in service of our artistic and public mission.

The Chief Operating Officer will play a central role in this transformation. You will work closely with me and the Senior Leadership Team to ensure the Academy runs with exceptional efficiency, creativity, and care. You will oversee all aspects of operational delivery; spanning finance, people, estates, facilities, and governance to ensure that the RA's structures, systems, and culture fully support our ambition. This is a role that demands both strategic vision and operational excellence: someone who can connect the big picture to the detail and translate ambition into delivery.

We are seeking a leader with the clarity, confidence, and collaborative spirit to shape the RA's financial and operational strategy, set clear performance standards, and drive sustainable growth. You will bring sound judgement, commercial acumen, and an instinct for enabling others to succeed. Above all, you will share our passion for the arts and our belief in the enduring power of creativity to inspire and enrich public life.

This is an extraordinary opportunity to help shape the Academy's future - to ensure that our operations, people, and resources reflect the excellence of our artistic vision. Together, we will build an organisation that is as dynamic and resilient behind the scenes as it is inspiring on the public stage.

I very much look forward to welcoming the successful candidate to this exciting journey.

Best wishes,

Simon Wallis, Secretary & Chief Executive OBE



Sir Grayson Perry RA

About us

The Royal Academy of Arts (RA) is one of the UK's most significant and distinctive cultural institutions. Founded in 1768 by a group of artists and architects with the support of King George III, it was established to promote the creation, enjoyment, and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education, and debate. For over 250 years, the RA has remained true to that purpose, while continually evolving to meet the needs of artists, students, and the public.

At the heart of the RA is its unique artist-led model. The organisation is governed by the Royal Academicians, painters, sculptors, architects, printmakers, and other artists who are elected by their peers. This ensures that practising artists shape the RA's direction, exhibitions, and education programmes.

This model makes the Academy different from most museums or galleries: it is not only a place for displaying art, but a living institution where art is created, debated, and advanced.

Throughout its history, the RA has stood for the principle that art and architecture matter to society. It believes that artists' voices are vital in shaping cultural and civic life, and that art should be accessible to all.

The RA's values are expressed through:

- Artistic excellence: maintaining world-class standards across exhibitions, collections, and teaching.
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion: removing barriers to access, whether financial, cultural, or physical.
- Environmental responsibility: adapting operations to contribute to a sustainable future.
- Public engagement: fostering dialogue and participation, ensuring that art enriches lives across communities.



What we do

Exhibitions and Public Engagement

The RA is renowned for its ambitious and wide-ranging exhibitions programme. These span classical and historic art through to contemporary practice, architecture, photography, and new media. Each year the RA attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors to exhibitions that are often landmark cultural events.

The best-known of these is the Summer Exhibition, the world's largest open-submission art show, which has taken place every year since 1769. Bringing together works by leading artists, emerging practitioners, and enthusiastic amateurs alike, the Summer Exhibition remains a defining feature of the RA's public identity and a celebration of artistic diversity.

Beyond exhibitions, the RA offers an extensive public programme of lectures, debates, family activities, and learning opportunities. These are designed to open up the world of art and architecture to the broadest possible audience, fostering dialogue and understanding, and encouraging creativity across generations.

RA Schools

Education is at the core of the RA's mission, exemplified by the Royal Academy Schools, the UK's longest-established art school. The RA Schools offers a full-time, three-year postgraduate programme in fine art that is unique in being free of tuition fees. Each year between 10 and 17 students are admitted, benefiting from dedicated studio space, access to specialist facilities, a high tutor-to-student ratio, and bursary support to help cover living and material costs.

The Schools attract applicants from across the UK and around the world, and their alumni have included some of the most influential artists of the past two centuries. By removing financial barriers, the RA Schools ensures that talent, not means, determines access to one of the most rigorous and supportive postgraduate art programmes available anywhere.

Collections, Heritage and Spaces

The RA's collection has grown since its foundation, with each newly elected Royal Academician donating a work to the Academy. Today this collection includes over 46,000 works, from historic masterpieces to contemporary pieces, and serves as a vital cultural resource.

The RA's home at Burlington House and 6 Burlington Gardens has recently undergone major redevelopment, including the creation of new galleries, lecture theatres, and public spaces, all linked by the Weston Bridge. These improvements have enabled the RA to display more of its collection, improve accessibility, and provide enhanced spaces for learning and debate.

Independence and Funding

Unlike many national cultural institutions, the RA is an independent charity. It receives no regular government funding and relies instead on a mixed economy of income streams: ticket sales, commercial activities, membership schemes such as the Friends of the RA, donations, sponsorship, and investment income. This independence is a strength, preserving the RA's artistic freedom, but it also brings financial challenges.

The RA has faced significant pressures in recent years, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Visitor numbers, which once exceeded 1.25 million annually, have recovered more slowly than hoped, with c.607,000 visitors recorded in 2023/24 compared to 846,000 in 2018/19. Rising costs, from energy to staffing, have added further strain. In 2023/24, income stood at around £38m, against expenditures of £46m.

To learn more about our current finances, please [click here](#).

And to view our ongoing strategy, please [click here](#).

Role description

Job title: Chief Operating Officer

Reports to: Secretary & Chief Executive

Direct reports: Deputy Director of Finance, Head of People, Head of Estates, Head of IT, Head of Procurement

Budget Responsibility: Direct operating costs budget responsibility for £10m (including staff costs for the department); total RA annual cost budget of £34m; annual capital expenditure budget of £1.7m; Masterplan Project Budget of £11.5m

Headcount Responsibility: c. 75 staff (plus outsourced facilities management, contract cleaning and security)

Role purpose:

As COO of one of London's leading public art galleries, you will oversee the RA's day-to-day operations, ensuring excellence in financial management, people, estates, facilities, and strategic delivery.

Working closely with the Secretary and Chief Executive Officer (S&CE) and Senior Leadership Team, you will lead cross-functional teams to support the RA's growth while driving performance and operational efficiency, to ensure long-term financial sustainability. The COO plays a key role in governance, compliance, and stakeholder engagement, ensuring the RA operates to the highest standards in service of its public mission.

The COO is second in command to the S&CE of the RA and a key member of the Senior Leadership Team. The COO will work with the S&CE on defining the financial and operational strategy, targets and KPIs of the RA.

With the S&CE and SLT, the COO is critical to shaping and implementing the RA's business strategy and objectives, its approach to people management and the delivery of the organisation's agreed priorities. The COO is specifically responsible for ensuring:

- The RA has an effective and co-ordinated support infrastructure through the various enabling teams.
- A robust effective annual operating plan and budget and five-year Medium-Term Plan.
- Delivery of the agreed plan for organisational transformation.
- Complete and timely delivery of the RA's strategic and operational objectives.

The COO acts as deputy to the S&CE when they are absent. The COO also attends and presents at the most senior governance meeting of the organisation, the RA Council.



Summer Exhibition Party 2025

Main responsibilities

Leading Strategic Excellence

- Provide strategic guidance and input to the S&CE and SLT in the development of organisational objectives and strategies, supporting the formulation of long and medium-term operational plans that maximise resource efficiency.
- Translate institutional vision into actionable outcomes by aligning operational capabilities with organisational ambitions, and champion initiatives that foster long and medium-term sustainability, commercial viability, and innovation.
- Ensure optimal management of reserves to support the sustained financial and operational health of the organisation.
- Lead the design and delivery of the annual strategic review and away day for the RA Council.

Performance, Delivery and Operational Planning

- Assist S&CE in setting medium and long-term targets, defining clear KPIs, and regularly monitoring and reporting to Council on the delivery of objectives and the performance of all RA teams.
- Responsible for the annual RA operating plan and budget and annual update of the Medium-Term Plan; ensuring it sets out clearly and simply what each team should deliver
- Monitor and regularly report to Council on the delivery of the annual operating plan, budget and RA medium term strategy.
- Introduce and oversee the execution and use of an effective staff performance management system throughout RA.

Financial Transformation, Business Planning, Operations and Reporting

- Lead on the financial transformation of the RA, taking oversight of the medium and long-term financial strategy informed by our Transformation Project.
- Ensure clarity and accountability across the SLT for financial targets and budgets, close monitoring of financial performance and cashflows, and ensure S&CE is regularly updated on the RA's financial position, risks and financial opportunities.
- Rethink how the RA reports on its financial performance, making it more effective for: ensuring individual Executive accountability; operational and strategic decision making and Governance oversight

- Ensure that senior managers understand and fulfil their responsibilities regarding budgeting and finance and have the skills and knowledge to work with our financial data effectively.
- Ensure effective and efficient financial operations, policies and processes, compliance with all statutory and regulatory reporting requirements.
- Ensure suitable bank financing arrangements are in place based on short and medium term cash projections, oversee relationships with banks and lenders ensuring covenant compliance and effective treasury management.
- Ensure cost-effective operations across the RA via an ongoing review of cost-base and oversight of all procurement activity, ensuring compliance with policy and delivery of best value for money.
- Lead the robust financial management of all major capital and strategic projects, as well as other minor estates and technology capital projects.
- Work with the Investment Sub-Committee on investment strategy decisions, investment manager relations and performance reporting, as well as maintaining excellent working relationships with the committee.
- Oversee the RA's insurance strategy, ensuring the RA is appropriately covered and that insurance arrangements continue to represent best value.

Stakeholder Engagement

- Develop excellent working relationships with members of Council, RA Trust, The Friends of the RA and RA Pension Scheme and various committees of Council, ensuring these bodies are informed with clear, brief and easily understood top-line information to enable the best strategic decision-making.
- Support the chairs of various committees of Council ensuring clear, succinct and impactful reporting and communication to enable informed, strategic decision making.
- Work with S&CE, General Counsel & Company Secretary to ensure RA Council and other committee members understand their responsibilities and are equipped to meet them.

Main responsibilities

RA Council & Committees	COO Responsibilities
RA Council	In attendance
People and Remuneration Committee	In attendance
Finance and Performance Committee	In attendance
Audit and Risk Committee	In attendance
RA Trust Investment Sub-Committee	In attendance
RA Pension Scheme	In attendance
DCGC Pension Committee	Chair

Risk (Shared)

- Oversee the timely identification and management of organisational risks according to the RA risk register, including from a people, financial, estates, IT and delivery perspective.
- Ensure that all executives are risk aware, risks are anticipated and identified at a very early stage, that they are understood and effectively managed, and that mitigations are effectively implemented.
- Senior executive responsible for Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Security (both physical security and cyber security) and the emergency response and salvage plans.

Inspiring Excellence in People and Performance

- Promote a collaborative, performance-driven culture across all departments
- Embed a customer, audience and data and results-focused mindset across all departments.
- Develop and deliver the key priorities as stated in our people strategy to make the RA a more diverse and inclusive employer.
- Ensure our staff are clear on the RA's brand and mission and understand their annual objectives
- Ensure our staff are regularly appraised and supported, aligned on values, and work effectively together to deliver our organisational priorities.
- Establish the RA as a trusted and valued employer that recognises and rewards talent and employee contributions.

Estates: Management, Engineering, Facilities, Building Projects

- Oversee the management and strategic use of buildings, galleries, and public spaces.
- Run and be accountable for effective delivery of facilities management and building services across the entire Royal Academy estate.
- Oversee the ongoing maintenance and preservation of the fabric of the estate and its compliance.
- Oversee the delivery of the Masterplan / capital projects – recent and upcoming projects include RA Schools refurbishment (£23m); Collection Gallery redevelopment (£11.5m); lift refurbishment (£0.5m); and Burlington House façade restoration (£0.8m).

IT Systems and Support

- Oversee the RA's IT delivery operations, including cybersecurity, Disaster Recovery and BAU activities

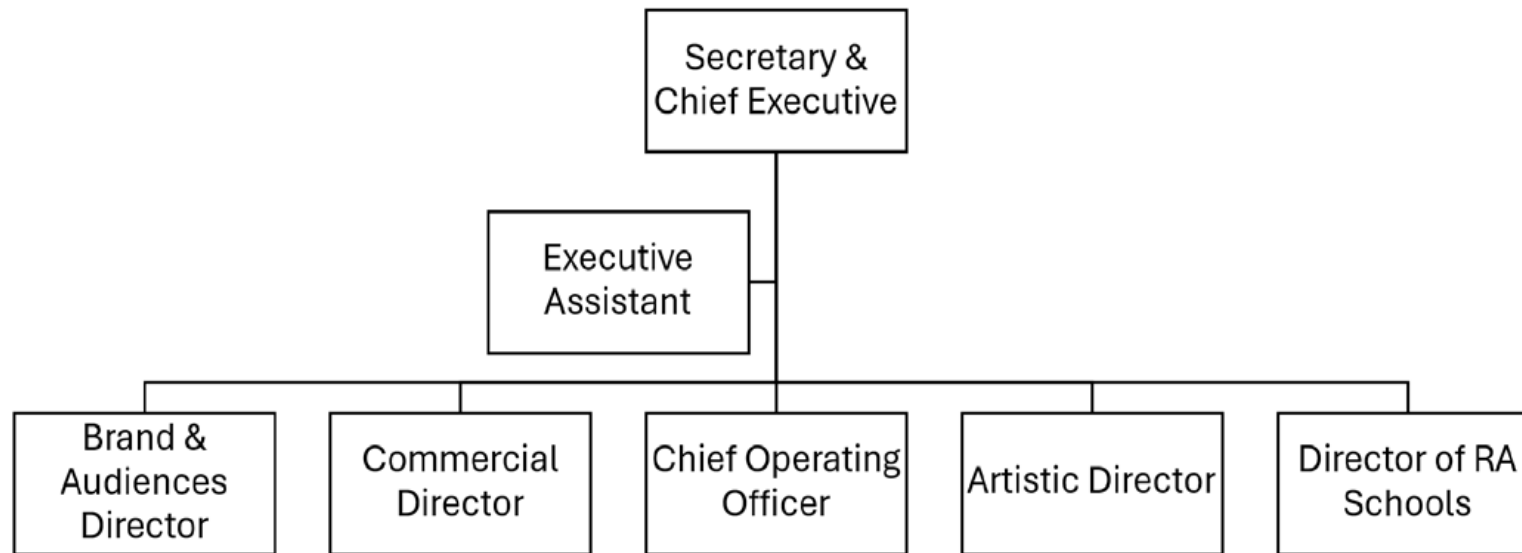
Digital and Innovation

Work with the Commercial Director and Head of Digital Technology & Insight to:

- Support digital and AI transformation initiatives that enhance engagement and generate income (e.g., e-commerce, virtual events, ticketing systems).
- Drive digital innovation across business processes and audience services and implement the greater use of AI integration for efficiency.
- **Conduct an AI opportunity audit** across departments (e.g., visitor services, marketing, retail, conservation, finance).
- Define **clear objectives** for AI use aligned with revenue growth, audience engagement, operational efficiency, and digital innovation.
- Prioritise initiatives based on **ROI**, ease of implementation, and relevance to the RA's mission.

Organisation structure

Senior Leadership Team



Person specification

Knowledge and Experience

- Professional accounting qualification or MBA preferred but not essential
- Experience operating at Board level
- Proven commercial insight with a track record turning strategy into measurable results
- Significant experience leading and developing senior staff across multiple disciplines
- Experience in driving and successfully delivering organisational change programmes

Skills and Abilities

- Effective diplomacy horizontally and vertically through organisations
- An ability to identify and understand and communicate the bigger picture to non-expert stakeholders as well as interpret detail
- Balances constructive challenge with collaboration, ensuring robust and inclusive decision-making.
- Proven networking ability across varied stakeholder sets

Personal Qualities

- A high degree of emotional and social intelligence
- Shows resilience and effectiveness when navigating adversity or uncertainty
- Soft and hard powers of persuasion using fact-based evidence as part of influencing
- Rapid and effective decision making
- Able to work highly collaboratively while providing constructive challenge and hold senior colleagues to account
- Able to model and advance an agenda for equality, diversity and inclusion on behalf of staff and visitors
- Passion for the arts and culture, with sensitivity to the Academy's mission as an artist-led institution.



Terms of appointment

Salary

Up to £140,000

Location

London with hybrid working.

Pension

Enhanced Pension Scheme - Employee pays 3%, 4%, 5% or 6% and receives employer contribution of 5%, 6%, 7% or 10% accordingly

Annual leave

25 days annual leave, plus bank holidays and 3 additional days leave at Christmas



Burlington Gardens Staircase

Additional benefits

Financial

- Season Ticket Loans
- Give as You Earn Scheme
- Staff Discounts in Café and Shop on site at the RA
- Reciprocal Agreements with other galleries
- Enhanced Maternity, Paternity and Shared Parental Leave benefit
- Professional Qualification Renewal Costs Covered
- Benefits Hub – online discounts on a range of travel, retailers & experiences

Family

- Life Insurance 3x salary
- Special Leave for last minute emergencies
- Agile Working Policy
- Enhanced Maternity, Paternity and Shared Parental Leave benefit
- Enhanced shared parental leave benefit
- Compassionate Leave
- Free entry for friends and family into RA exhibitions

Health & Wellbeing

- Virtual Private GP and Second Medical Opinion Service
- Taxis home for anyone finishing after 11pm
- £50 voucher towards glasses for VDU users
- Enhanced Holiday – 25 days
- 3 additional days leave at Christmas for all staff
- Cycle to Work Scheme
- EAP – 24/7 advice line, online portal and face to face counselling sessions
- Volunteering opportunities
- Agile Working Policy
- Mental Health First Aiders
- Meditation Drop in Sessions

Cultural, Social & Developmental

- Free access into all RA exhibitions
- Curator led talks
- Other talks & events for staff
- RA Choir
- RA Netball Club
- LGBTQ+ staff network
- RA Staff Council
- Thirsty Thursday Social
- RA Breakfasts
- Annual RA Party – the phenomenal social event of the year!
- Leadership Training
- Basic Skills Courses
- Race Equity & Inclusion Training
- Access to the Apprentice Levy and other funding for development courses

How to apply

We hope you will consider making an application. To make an application, please go to <https://starfishsearch.com/jobs/raa-coo> and click on the apply now button, with the following prepared:

- Your CV (no more than three sides).
- A supporting statement (no more than two sides) that sets out why you think this role is the right move for you and how you meet the knowledge and experience criteria.

We would also be grateful if you would complete the Equality and Diversity monitoring form on the online application process. This form is for monitoring purposes only and is not treated as part of your application.

Closing date: Friday 28th November 2025

Preliminary interviews: w/c 8th December and w/c 15th December 2025

Final Panel interviews: Early January 2026

