

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.

As part of this next phase, we are strengthening our leadership capacity across several key areas of the organisation. A number of new senior appointments have recently been made across our artistic, commercial, and audience-facing functions, bringing fresh perspectives and renewed energy to the Academy. The Chief Operating Officer will join this evolving leadership team at an exciting moment, working closely with colleagues across the organisation to help shape the next chapter of the RA's development and ensure we have the operational strength, clarity, and ambition required to deliver on our vision.

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 plays a key role in strategy, governance, compliance, and stakeholder engagement, ensuring the RA operates to the highest standards in service of its public mission. We are looking for a strategic, commercially rigorous institutional operator capable of stabilising and modernising a complex, independent cultural organisation with a significant estate.

As importantly, 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. 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.



RA Lates Summer Party 2018

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

The COO is a key member of the Senior Leadership Team, responsible for creating, overseeing and tracking the Annual Operating Plan, monitoring all operating performance against agreed KPIs and targets, and, together with the CEO, formally holding all Directors regularly accountable for delivering them.

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

You will be accountable for the delivery of agreed institutional KPIs. You will make the RA operationally excellent, financially disciplined and strategically aligned in a highly competitive commercial environment.

Role Overview

With the CEO 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 and effective annual operating plan
- Delivery of the agreed plan for organisational transformation and greater income generation.
- Clear visibility of progress in the delivery of all the RA's agreed strategic and operational objectives through timely tracking and reporting of performance, accessible to SLT, Council and relevant committees
- All operational divisions to produce clear plans to mitigate risk and/or improve performance when needed if the timely delivery of agreed targets is under threat

The COO will ensure that the RA consistently delivers visitor, financial and operational targets by:

- Introducing and managing a disciplined, regular and accessible RA wide operations planning and tracking process
- Ensuring cost, revenue and contribution reporting information guides all operational and business decisions to meet annual targets and objectives
- Introducing and running an effective RA executive and staff performance management system, including regular tracking, feedback, appraisal and reporting

The COO also attends and presents at the most senior governance meeting of the organisation, the RA Council.

Measures of Success (first 24 months):

- Delivery of a detailed Annual Operating Plan to support the delivery of the annual budget
- Review and approve all operational planning and performance monitoring in the RA's operations to ensure a commercially orientated, data and information informed, professional approach to running all the RA's operations
- Delivery of a balanced operating budget
- Improved operating margin
- Masterplan delivered on time and budget
- Performance management framework and systems designed, approved and operational
- Risk register fully embedded and live
- Staff engagement improvement



Main Objectives/ Responsibilities

Strategy

- Collaborate with the Head of Transformation to ensure delivery of our Transformation Project where it intersects/impacts operational planning
- Provide strategic guidance and input to the CEO and SLT in the development of organisational objectives and strategies, supporting the formulation of long and medium-term operational plans that maximise resource efficiency, sustainability and income generation.
- Translate institutional vision into detailed actionable outcomes with KPIs, by aligning operational capabilities with organisational ambitions, and championing initiatives that foster long and medium-term sustainability, commercial viability, and innovation.
- Lead the design and delivery of the annual strategic review and away day for the RA Council.

Performance, Delivery and Operational Planning

- Collaborate closely with CEO 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; ensuring it sets out clearly and simply what each team is required to deliver
- Monitor and regularly report to Council on the delivery of the annual operating plan & all aspects of our overarching strategy
- Introduce and oversee the execution and use of an effective staff performance management system throughout RA.
- Address and manage issues regarding cost discipline, profit margin improvement, yield optimisation, procurement efficiency, contract renegotiation and scenario planning.

Stakeholder Engagement

- Develop excellent working relationships with members of Council, RA Trust, The Friends of the RA 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 and timely strategic decision making.

- Work with CEO and General Counsel to ensure RA Council and other committee members understand their responsibilities and are equipped to meet them.
- Act as Secretary to the People & Remuneration Committee (working with the Chair to set the agenda and facilitate the production of meeting papers).

Legal & Risk

- Oversee the timely identification and management of organisational risks according to the RA risk register, including from a people, financial, estates, IT, legal and delivery perspective.
- Ensure that all executives are risk aware, risks are anticipated and identified at a very early stage, that they are clearly 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.
- Oversee the legal team and anticipate and manage key legal risks across the organisation.

Governance

- Develop excellent working relationships with members of Council, RA Trust 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
- Ensure that RA's governance structures have the right membership, expertise and effective, efficient, administration.
- Support the Chairs of the Audit and Risk Committee, Finance and Performance Committee, and People & Remuneration Committee, together with the Head of People, ensuring clear, succinct and impactful reporting and communication to enable informed, strategic decision making
- Work with CEO and General Counsel 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

- 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

People

- Promote a collaborative, performance-driven culture across all departments
- Embed a customer, audience, 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 to maximise income.
- Run, and be accountable for, effective delivery of facilities management and building services across the entire Royal Academy estate.

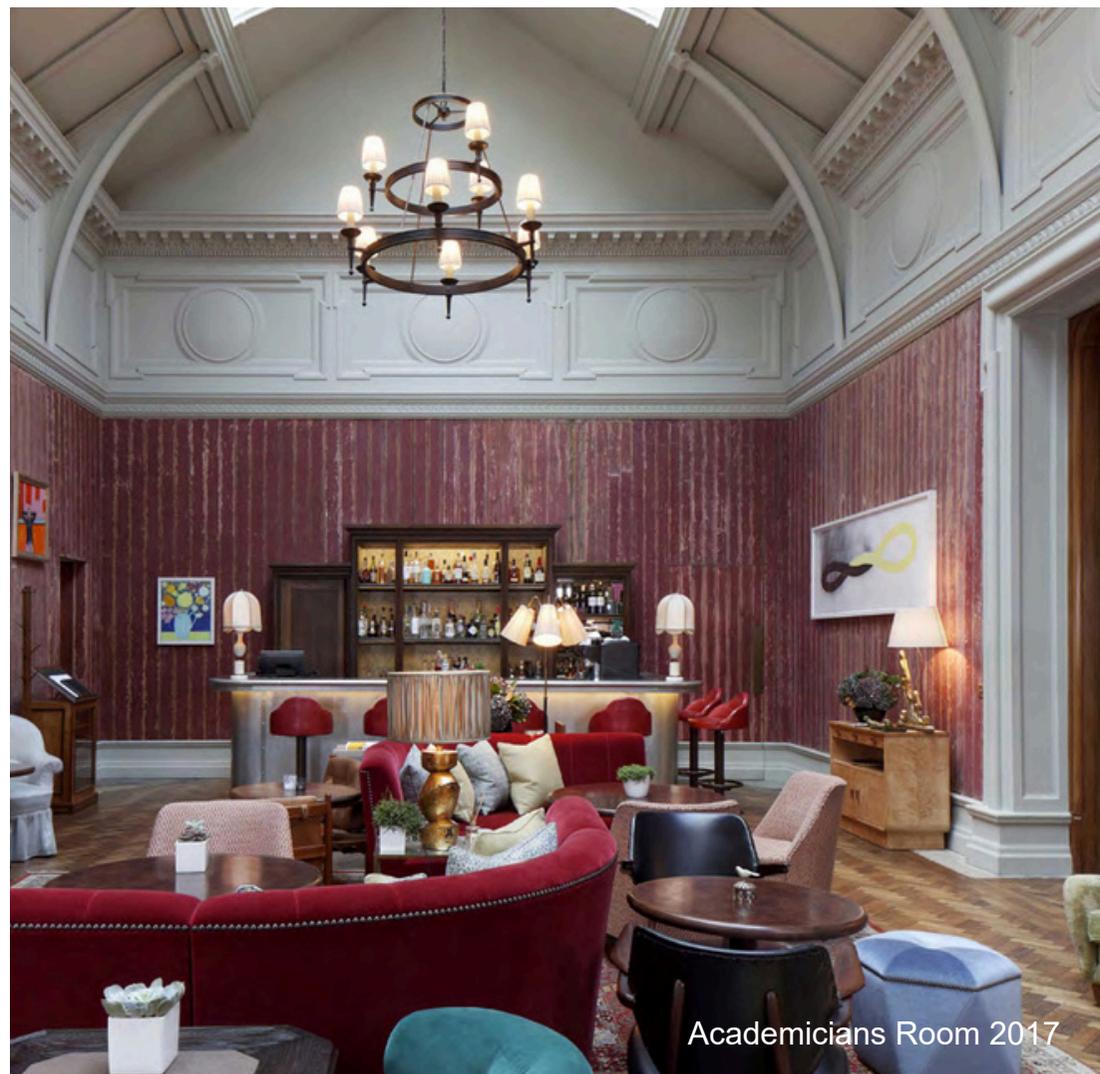
Person Specification

Knowledge and understanding

- Currently operating at Board level with significant experience of leading and developing senior staff across multiple disciplines
- Experience leading operational and support teams (e.g. Facilities, Estates, Security, Ticketing, Welcome, IT, Digital, People & Culture)
- Experience in driving and successfully delivering organisational change programmes
- Broad experience looking after a historic listed building or estate (or equivalent)
- Experience of governance and of managing risk and business continuity
- Proven commercial & financial acumen

Personal attributes and competencies

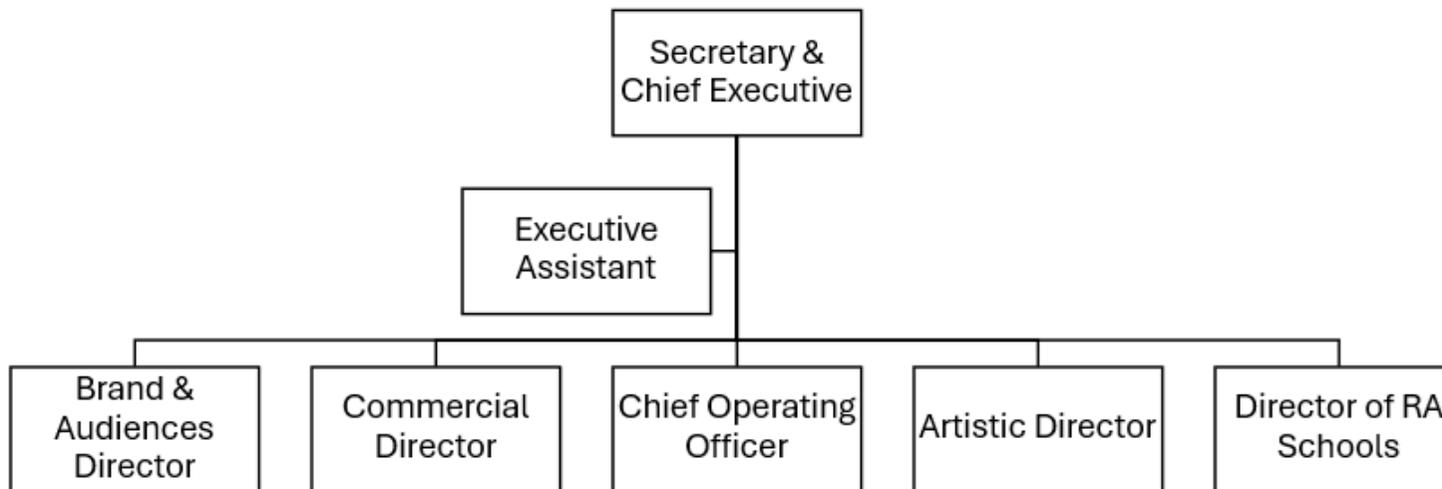
- Experienced strategic thinker
- Effective diplomacy horizontally and vertically through organisations
- An ability to identify and understand and communicate the bigger picture to non-expert stakeholders as well as interpret detail
- A high degree of emotional and social intelligence
- Effective cut through in adversity
- The ability to challenge and support effectively
- Soft and hard powers of persuasion using fact-based evidence as part of influencing
- Rapid and effective decision making
- Consultative: 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
- Proven networking ability across varied stakeholder sets



Academicians Room 2017

Organisation structure

Senior Leadership
Team



Terms of appointment

Salary

Circa £120,000

Location

Burlington House, Piccadilly, London

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/roa-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: 19th April
Preliminary interviews: w/c 27th April
Final Panel interviews: w/c 11th May



Demonstrate Create Justine Trickett