

ROLE DESCRIPTION AND PERSON SPECIFICATION

Chief Executive Officer: The Royal Society for Asian Affairs

The Society

The Royal Society for Asian Affairs was founded in 1901 as the Central Asian Society, became the Royal Central Asian Society in 1931, and took its present name in 1975. It is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered charity number 1179300. Its charitable object is to promote learning and advance education in the subject of and with regard to all the countries of Asia, and its beneficiary is the general public. Its President is Professor Peter Frankopan.

The Society is an open, active and international network for informed debate about Asia, engaging experts, policy makers and the wider public with experience, analysis and scholarship. Its geographical remit runs from the eastern Mediterranean to the Pacific. It values and upholds free speech and open debate; it is independent of governments and political bodies; it accepts no direct state or political party funding ; and it takes no institutional position on questions of policy at its meetings or in its publications.

The Society's work includes:

- *Asian Affairs*, the Society's quarterly journal, in continuous publication since 1914 and produced in partnership with Taylor & Francis. It is the Society's largest single source of income.
- the *Asian Review of Books*, which joined the Society in 2025 and publishes reviews, essays and a weekly podcast; the magazine *Caravanserai*, now in its third year; the Society's blog; and a programme of scholarly editions.
- a year-round programme of lectures, book talks, research presentations and conferences, held online, in person and in hybrid form, reaching a global audience.
- the Schools' Day, run jointly with SOAS for sixth-form students and their teachers; the Travel and Research Awards; the RSAA Medal; and a recently established mentoring scheme.
- the Society's library, archive and collections. The collections are being digitised, and the Society is in negotiation over the deposit of the physical material with a major research library.
- its members and supporters, who have been at the heart of the Society since its foundation and remain its strongest advocates.

The Society is an accredited Living Wage Employer, has held the Charity Excellence Framework Quality Mark for three successive years, and is registered with the Fundraising Regulator.

Candidates are asked to read the Society's most recent Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts, which is available on the Charity Commission's register and on the RSAA website.

The next phase

The Society is marking its 125th anniversary in 2026. As it does so, the Board of Trustees is settling the Society's future direction, and the postholder should expect to lead the Society through a period of significant change. That work will include building a substantial fundraising capability where none has previously existed, settling the Society's longer-term operating model, and preparing a new business plan for the period after 2027. The Board is looking for a Chief Executive who will treat that prospect as an opportunity rather than a burden.

Terms

Job title	Chief Executive Officer
Reporting to	The Board of Trustees, represented on a day-to-day basis by the Chairman
Responsible for	The Head of Operations and the Head of Programmes and Media; the Society's self-employed and contracted editorial staff; interns and volunteers
Hours	22.5 hours per week. Occasional evening working is part of the role, in connection with the Society's events.
Contract	Permanent, subject to a probationary period of 6 months
Salary	From £80,000 per annum, full-time equivalent, paid pro rata, depending on skills and experience. Paid monthly in arrears. A workplace pension is available, and the Society is an accredited Living Wage Employer.
Location	The role is largely remote. The Society's registered address is Nova North, 11 Bressenden Place is for correspondence only; the Board may consider taking on new premises in the future. The postholder will need to attend and host the Society's events and meetings in London from time to time.
Travel	Occasional travel within the United Kingdom, and less frequently overseas, may be required in connection with fundraising and partnerships. Travel is otherwise rarely needed.
Annual leave	28 days per annum, pro rata, including public holidays
Notice period	During the probation period, one week. Thereafter three months.
Other requirements	The successful candidate must have the right to work in the United Kingdom; proof may be required. The post is subject to a Disclosure and Barring Service check.

Purpose of the role

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the activities, administration, staff and finances of the Society, and for implementing the strategy and budget agreed by the Board of Trustees. The Chief Executive is the Society's principal executive officer and one of its principal public representatives.

This is a hands-on role. The Society's executive team consists of three people. The Chief Executive leads and directs, but also does: drafting board papers, writing to donors, dealing with the accountants, answering members, and turning a hand to whatever the week requires. Candidates who would expect to work through a larger management structure should consider this carefully before applying.

Key responsibilities

1. Fundraising and income generation

This is the most important element of the role, and will occupy a substantial part of the postholder's time. The Chief Executive will:

- lead the implementation of the Society's recently agreed fundraising strategy, securing unrestricted support for the Society's core work as well as restricted

funding for particular activities; and building a development function where none has previously existed.

- identify, cultivate, solicit and steward major donors, trusts, foundations and corporate supporters, personally and with the support of the Chairman, the President and the trustees;
- pursue legacies and individual giving, and develop and maintain the Society's case for support;
- ensure that all fundraising complies with the Code of Fundraising Practice and with the Society's Gift Acceptance and Independence Policy.

2. Publications and publishing partnerships

- with the Chairman of the Editorial Board, manage the Society's relationship with Taylor & Francis, the publishers of *Asian Affairs*, including when needed the negotiation and renewal of the publishing agreement, and protect and develop the income the journal generates;
- support the Editor of *Asian Affairs* and the Chairman of the Editorial Board, respecting the editorial independence of the journal;
- support the Head of Programmes and Media and the Head of Operations in their management of the *Asian Review of Books*, *Caravanserai*, the blog and the programme of scholarly editions, developing their reach and, where appropriate, their contribution to income;

3. Programmes, awards and education

- support the Head of Programmes and Media in directing the Society's programme of lectures, conferences and other events, ensuring that it is of high quality, that it reflects the whole of the Society's geographical remit, and that it serves both a live and an online audience;
- oversee the Schools' Day and the Society's other educational activity, and secure the funding on which they depend;
- oversee the Travel and Research Awards, the RSAA Medal and the mentoring scheme, and the committees and panels that administer them;
- develop partnerships and collaborations with universities, learned societies, cultural institutions and others, in the United Kingdom and internationally.

4. The Society's collections

- in collaboration with the Society's Archivist, oversee the continuing digitisation of the Society's collections and their use as a public and scholarly resource;
- in collaboration with the Society's Archivist, conduct the negotiation, currently in progress, for the deposit of the physical collections with a major research library, and manage the relationship that follows from it;
- ensure that the collections are properly cared for, insured and accounted for, and that the designated fund for their care and development is applied to its purpose.

5. Members and supporters

- ensure that members and supporters receive the benefits they are due and are well communicated with, through the Society's newsletter, publications, events and online channels;
- represent the Society to its members, including at the Annual General Meeting, and advise the Board on the Society's relationship with them.

6. Staff and management

- recruit, lead, manage and develop the Society's staff, contractors, interns and volunteers, and set and review their objectives;
- lead a small and dispersed team well: several colleagues know their own fields better than the Chief Executive will, and the task is to enable them and hold them to account rather than to direct them;
- maintain the Society's employment policies and its obligations as an employer, including as a Living Wage Employer;
- maintain the Society's systems, digital infrastructure and data, and its arrangements for home-based working.

7. Governance, finance and compliance

- report to the Board of Trustees, and provide the Board and its committees with accurate, timely and candid information and advice on all aspects of the Society's business, including its legal and regulatory obligations;
- prepare and service the business of the Board and of the Society's committees, and implement their decisions;
- prepare the annual budget and manage the Society's finances within it, working with the Treasurer, the Society's bookkeepers and its independent examiner, and oversee the preparation of the Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts;
- work with the Society's investment managers within the Society's investment and reserves policies and under the direction of the Finance and Investment Committee;
- maintain the Society's risk register and its policy framework, and ensure compliance with charity law, filing requirements, data protection, safeguarding and the Society's insurance obligations;
- [take the role of Company Secretary to the Society / oversee the discharge of Company Secretary duties by the Head of Operations under the Chief Executive's direction].

8. External representation

- act as one of the principal public faces of the Society, with the Chairman and the President, and build the Society's standing among Asia specialists, policy makers, publishers, funders and the wider public;
- uphold in all external dealings the Society's independence and its practice of taking no institutional position on questions of policy.

Person specification

The appointment panel will look for evidence against the criteria below. Criteria marked E are essential; those marked D are desirable.

Requirement	E / D
Experience	
Experience at a senior level, with personal accountability for the delivery of an organisation's objectives, its budget and its staff	E
Experience of working to, or as part of, a governing body	E
Experience of the charity sector, whether in a paid role or as a trustee	D
Experience of leading an organisation through significant change, or of merger, partnership or restructuring	D
Experience of academic or scholarly publishing, or of working with a commercial publisher	D
Experience of a membership or subscriber-based organisation	D
Experience of collections, archives or digitisation projects	D
Fundraising	
A clear understanding that fundraising, and in particular the cultivation and solicitation of major gifts and endowment, will initially be the most important element of the role	E
Demonstrable aptitude and enthusiasm for fundraising, including a willingness to ask individuals and institutions for money, to be refused, and to persist	E
A record of raising funds from trusts, foundations, corporate sponsors or individual donors	D
Skills and abilities	
General financial literacy: the ability to work confidently with budgets, management accounts, reserves and investment reporting, and with the Society's Treasurer, its bookkeepers and its independent examiner	E
The ability to lead and manage a very small, remote-working team, including colleagues who have significantly greater knowledge of their areas of expertise than the postholder, securing their commitment without directing their specialism	E
Strong networking skills, and the ability to build and sustain relationships with donors, partners, academics, publishers, public officials and supporters	E
Confidence in public-facing roles: speaking, chairing and representing the Society to external audiences and to the media	E
Excellent written and spoken English, and the ability to write for both general and specialist readers	E
The ability to work independently and productively from home, and to set and hold priorities without close supervision	E
Sound judgement and discretion, and the ability to give a board of trustees timely, accurate and candid advice	E
Competence with the digital tools of a small modern charity: membership and event systems, websites, social media, and online and hybrid events	D

Knowledge

An informed general interest in Asia and its contemporary affairs, a relevant network of contacts, and a willingness to keep both up to date. Specialist or scholarly expertise in Asia is not required	E
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An understanding of charity governance and of the duties of trustees and of a charity's senior employee, or the willingness to acquire it rapidly	E
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Disposition and other requirements

A commitment to the Society's charitable object of advancing knowledge of Asia, and to its position as an organisation that upholds free speech and open debate, is independent of governments and political bodies, and takes no institutional position on questions of policy	E
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A commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in the Society's work, its programmes and its employment practices	E
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The right to work in the United Kingdom; proof may be required	E
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Diversity

The Society welcomes applications from all suitably qualified people and is committed to equality of opportunity. Applications are considered on merit, and no applicant will receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. The Society will make reasonable adjustments at any stage of the recruitment process and in the role itself, and asks candidates to say what adjustments they would find helpful.

How to apply

Applicants should submit a CV (maximum two pages) and short covering letter explaining how they fit the job description and person specification. The closing date for applications is 30 October 2026. Short-listed candidates will be interviewed in November.

The Society's Chairman, Professor Kerry Brown, and the current CEO, Michael Ryder, are available to discuss the position with interested individuals. If you would like to arrange a conversation with either, please contact Joseph Doherty, joseph.doherty@rsaa.org.uk