



Candidate brief for the position of  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**  
**National Garden Scheme**

February 2025

## The Organisation

### What the National Garden Scheme does

"The National Garden Scheme (NGS) raises substantial funds for nursing and health charities by offering unique access to exceptional private gardens across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Isles. The money is generated from garden admissions, refreshments and plant sales. Currently around 3,500 gardens open every year throughout England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands.

The charity was founded in 1927 by the Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI) of which it remained part until 1980 when it became an independent charity. It is a registered charitable company (charity no. 1112664, company no 5631421).

Originally established to raise funds for district nurses (who were at that time managed and supported by the Queen's Nursing Institute), the National Garden Scheme is now the most significant charitable funder of nursing in the UK and our beneficiaries include Macmillan Cancer Support, Marie Curie, Hospice UK, Carers Trust and Parkinson UK – in addition to the Queen's Nursing Institute. For all of these charities we are their most long-standing continuous funder and, in most cases, cumulatively the largest.

The cumulative level of our long-term support for this group of nursing and health charities enables us to lead joint activity by the group and to influence health policymakers, for instance in reports such as *Health Charities and the NHS: a vital partnership in peril?* We commissioned this from the London School of Economics, and it was produced in January 2021.

The National Garden Scheme doesn't just open beautiful gardens for charity – we are passionate about the physical and mental health benefits of gardens too. In 2016 The King's Fund published the groundbreaking report, *Gardens and Health, implications for policy and practice* which we commissioned. Since that year an increasing part of our annual donations has gone to charities building or developing gardens for general health purposes or in conjunction with a health facility such as a hospital. In recent years our support for community garden projects has become an increasingly significant part of our gardens and health programme. We also fund support and training of gardeners and others working in horticulture.

A full list of the current beneficiaries is on the website, [www.ngs.org.uk/who-we-are/beneficiaries/](http://www.ngs.org.uk/who-we-are/beneficiaries/)

Affordability has always been a major priority for the National Garden Scheme. For the first few decades all gardens charged one shilling admission; today the average admission is £6 and in nearly all gardens' children go free. Home-made teas are a well-known feature of a NGS open day and many offer plants for sale. The events have a strong local community atmosphere as the majority of visitors travel less than 20 miles.







### How it is organised

The National Garden Scheme is governed by a Board of Trustees of up to 15 trustees including the Chair, Deputy Chair and Hon Treasurer. Its Patron is His Majesty The King; its President is Dame Mary Berry. There is a group of Vice-Presidents (past Chairs and Trustees), and a group of Ambassadors who promote and support the charity.

In addition to the Chair, Deputy and Treasurer there are up to 12 other Trustees. Six are Regional Chairs who are active volunteers on a county team and leading a regional group of these teams. The others are independent Trustees who bring a mixture of skills, experience and contacts to the Board.

Throughout the nations where it is active the National Garden Scheme is represented by teams of volunteers in every county. Currently there is a total of between 550 and 600 volunteers. Each team is led by a county organiser and there is also a county treasurer, who manages funds coming in from gardens and other financial matters in the county. Other team members look after publicity, county booklets (see below), social media or assist the county organiser in looking after and supporting garden owners and finding new gardens to open.

There is a small central team of employed staff (currently 13) who are based at the charity's office at the National Trust property Hatchlands Park, East Clandon, near Guildford in Surrey. They are led by the Chief Executive and include the following current roles:

- Head of Operations to whom four County Support Officers report
- Finance Manager
- Head of Marketing
- Head of Communications
- Website Manager
- Social Media Manager
- Community Garden Grants Manager
- Administrator

The staff provide a range of operational, financial and marketing support to volunteers in county teams and to garden owners. They manage the central operations of finance and accounts, marketing and communications, events (such as the Chelsea Flower Show) and fundraising that is additional to the main operation of opening gardens.

In recent years the operations and other activities of the charity have become increasingly digital. Gardens now register their details for opening and all the financial details of an open day online. The website is the charity's main source of information for the public and has a Find a Garden search engine. The website, social media and weekly e-newsletters have become major drivers of visitors to gardens, but the charity also continues to produce printed promotional material, in particular the annual *Garden Visitor's Handbook* (often known as 'the Yellow Book'). It contains all gardens opening in a given year and is sold through bookshops. In addition, there are County Booklets which contain the details of individual counties and are distributed free. The *Garden Visitor's Handbook* is put together centrally, the booklets are put together in individual counties by county volunteers.



## Financial position

The National Garden Scheme has always had the principal objective of raising funds at gardens that are then given away to beneficiaries. Other than funds necessary to cover annual costs and to maintain appropriate reserve levels, net income is all distributed annually. The majority of operational costs are covered by income from sponsorship, advertising in publications, fundraising events, merchandise sales, corporate partners and donations. This ensures that the minimum amount of garden income needs to be retained to contribute to operational costs. We are proud that for many years more than 80% of garden income has been donated.

The financial performance has been remarkably consistent. A combination of steady income growth from year to year combined with good cost control has ensured that charitable donations to beneficiaries have also grown from year to year as shown by the table below.

£000	2022	2023	2024
Net Garden Income	£3,938	£4,165	£4,278
Total (unrestricted) income	£4,593	£4,842	£5,113
Total Costs	£1,356	£1,512	£1,550
Distributed to Charities	£3,205*	£3,811*	£3,551

\*. Includes donations deferred from the previous year

*In addition to the sums distributed centrally to charities, a further £250-£300k is distributed annually to local charities by individual gardens*

Even during the two years of Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021 the situation was managed sufficiently to ensure that normal levels of donations were maintained. This was despite all gardens being closed in 2020 for the first time in the charity's history and access to gardens for the rest of that year and through 2021 being restricted.

Historically the National Garden Scheme always operated with unrestricted funds. In recent years funds from legacies and the more recent fundraising campaign linked to the charity's centenary in 2027 have created both designated and restricted funds. Income from legacies goes into a designated fund and can be used on application from the Chief Executive to the Board of Trustees, to pay for capital expenditure and specific projects to develop the charity's operations. Funds raised in the centenary programme go into a restricted fund where capital will accrue and only income be paid out or are committed for a specific part of our work such as supporting the community gardens programme. The long-term purpose of these funds is to give the charity greater financial security with reduced dependence on garden income to contribute to operational costs.





## The future

The National Garden Scheme enjoys a rich history and looks forward to a future of positive growth in both revenue and recognition. The charity is dependent upon the goodwill and generous efforts of hundreds of volunteers working across the country. The key ambitions of the Board of Trustees are to continue to increase income whilst containing costs; to continue to support and nurture the volunteers which have always been at the heart of the charity; to ensure the development of the charity's relevance and reputation.

In recent years the National Garden Scheme has transformed its image to become more adventurous and relevant. New branding introduced for the 90th anniversary in 2017 made a significant contribution. It has also broadened its audiences of both people who get involved and the wider network of supporters. The charity has widened its sphere of activities, in particular in the introduction of its ground-breaking gardens and health and community garden programmes, and in the development of close partnerships with its beneficiary charities. These are now all firm pillars of today's National Garden Scheme that should be built on and strengthened in the future, alongside continued nurturing and development of the charity's core activity of opening gardens to raise funds.

The ongoing success of that core activity is dependent upon the enormous contribution to the charity by the volunteers who open their gardens and who make up the members of county teams. Many do both. Levels of satisfaction and engagement amongst them are currently very high and relations with the head office staff are excellent. The future health and happiness of the charity needs this to continue.

The National Garden Scheme's centenary in 2027 has the potential to be a major milestone for the charity and springboard for its future success. A number of plans are already under way and the centenary has a steering group led by the Chair.

It is with this background and following the decision by the current Chief Executive to retire in order for a new person to take charge before the centenary, that the National Garden Scheme is seeking a new Chief Executive. The particulars of the role are described in the next section.



## The Role

The Chief Executive is the senior paid member of staff and responsible to the Board of Trustees for the operational leadership of the organisation. He or she works closely with the Chair, the Board of Trustees, the staff and the network of volunteers, and with the leaders of the beneficiary charities and other key partners and supporters.

The individual leads on all aspects of policy development, has financial accountability and is responsible for the effective management of staff and volunteers. Key responsibilities also include projecting and developing the NGS public profile and fostering and promoting effective relations with its supporters and beneficiaries.

They manage the small team of staff at the charity's head office at Hatchlands Park in Surrey and are responsible for overseeing the activities of approximately 600 volunteers organised in county and regional structures in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands.

The head office is the principal place of work, however there is a requirement for the Chief Executive to travel; to London for Board and other trustee meetings, and meetings with beneficiary Chief Executives; around the country to six regional AGMs in February/March, and to individual events organised by county volunteers for their garden owners. The ability to commit to visiting gardens at weekends would be considered positive, as support and thanks for garden owners is key to the charity's success.

The individual will be expected to bring vision, energy, direction and expertise to the role, along with exemplary ethical standards.

The Chief Executive will be expected to have the characteristics necessary to be able to manage volunteers effectively. This will require a level of consultation greater than is typical in a commercial organisation, and the ability to listen and to persuade. The ability to communicate on a personal basis is important, without being dependent on mass forms of communication.

While at all times working with the policy framework approved by the Board of Trustees and with the support and collaboration of the Chair, the post-holder has freedom of action. The individual is expected to provide leadership and work proactively to further the aims of the National Garden Scheme.

The Chief Executive will have a duty to keep the Chair and the Board abreast of all significant developments; in return they have the right to be consulted by the Chair and the Council before significant decisions are made.

### Primary objectives

The key elements of the Chief Executive role are to:

- provide operational leadership to the charity within the governance framework established by the Board and with the highest ethical standards
- develop and deliver successive strategic plans to meet the aspirations and objectives of the organisation over the longer term





- develop a detailed operational plan to deliver the strategy including staffing and resources plans
- be responsible and accountable to the Board for the initiation and development of policies for consideration, the efficient management of the organisation, and supervision of its activities
- ensure the input of the Chair, the Board and its committees, the staff and volunteers are coordinated effectively so that the organisation achieves its charitable and strategic objectives
- develop and project the National Garden Scheme's public profile and foster effective relations with its supporters and beneficiaries
- develop budgets and manage and monitor financial performance
- foster positive relationships with key contributors including volunteers, garden owners and supporting partners
- provide a strong team-oriented developmental environment for those working at the office, which enables them to do their part in supporting each other and the wider county-based volunteers
- build the external profile of the charity by developing effective relationships with beneficiary charities and key figures in nursing and health as well as with gardening related and other media, existing and potential new supporters and sponsors





## The Candidate

### Experience

We are seeking a high calibre individual to lead our enthusiastic and committed organisation. Candidates for this role will enjoy the challenge of building the effectiveness and profile of the National Garden Scheme as well as achieving sustained growth and increase in revenues. The successful candidate will be highly organised, articulate, and have a demonstrable track record of successful leadership, managing staff, finances and volunteers. Some knowledge of gardens would be an asset, a demonstrable enthusiasm for gardens is essential. Experience of income generation and fundraising will be helpful.

Experience sought includes:

- senior management experience, including business and major project development, fundraising and people management
- a track record of successfully developing and delivering a business strategy
- using media effectively and successfully to promote a charity or related organisation

### Key skills and attributes

The successful candidate will bring the following skills and attributes:

- Proven strategic and analytical skills with an ability to translate strategies into achievable goals
- Expertise in developing and delivering an annual business plan
- Effective leadership of a team of staff and a large group of volunteers
- Financial literacy and experience of working within budgets and understanding financial information
- The proven ability to inspire and engage with a wide range of audiences
- Personal presence and excellent influencing, negotiating and interpersonal communication skills
- A strong networker and relationship developer
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- A good, experienced public presenter
- Competent user of IT and current communications technology including social media
- Enthusiasm for and – ideally – knowledge of gardens



## Terms of Appointment

### Salary and pension arrangements

The salary will be competitive and set at a rate commensurate with the successful candidate's experience. There is a performance related annual bonus.

The charity has a workplace pension scheme, but the Board will be happy to discuss other appropriate pension arrangements.

### Leave

The initial entitlement is 34 days annual leave (inclusive of eight Bank Holidays). After two years continuous service the entitlement increased by one day per year to a maximum of 39 days.

### Location

#### Head Office

The National Garden Scheme - East Wing, Hatchlands Park, East Clandon, Guildford, Surrey, GU4 7RT



## How to Apply

To apply, please submit a CV along with a covering letter setting out your interest in the role and briefly summarising how you meet the key requirements of the role.

The preferred method of application is online at [www.berwickpartners.co.uk/92908](http://www.berwickpartners.co.uk/92908)

If you are unable to apply online, please email your application to:  
[response.manager@berwickpartners.co.uk](mailto:response.manager@berwickpartners.co.uk)

All applications will receive an automated response.

All candidates are also requested to complete an online Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form which will be found at the end of the application process.

For **detailed information** on how we process your personal data, please review our privacy policy on our website <https://berwickpartners.co.uk/privacy-and-cookie-policy/>

In line with GDPR, we ask that you **do NOT send us** any information that can identify children or any of your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, data concerning health or sex life and sexual orientation, genetic and/or biometric data) in your CV and application documentation. Following this notice, any inclusion of your Sensitive Personal Data in your CV/application documentation will be understood by us as your express consent to process this information going forward. Please also remember to not mention anyone's information or details (e.g. referees) who have not previously agreed to their inclusion.

If you have any queries or would like more information in regard to this document, please contact:

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## Recruitment Schedule

Closing Date for Applications	Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> March 2025
Preliminary Interviews with Berwick Partners	Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup> & Thursday 27 <sup>th</sup> March 2025
1 <sup>st</sup> Client Interviews	w/c 7 <sup>th</sup> April 2025
Final Client Interviews	w/c 14 <sup>th</sup> April 2025







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