RWS
Royal Watercolour Society

ELECTION OF RWS ASSOCIATE MEMBERS
APPLICATION GUIDELINES 2026

Dear Applicant,

Thank you for expressing an interest in joining the Royal Watercolour Society as an Associate Member. Founded in 1804, the RWS is the oldest watercolour society in the world and is bestowed with Royal patronage from His Majesty the King. The Society is based at Bankside Gallery in London, with an additional premises RWS Gallery, near Trafalgar Square.

If elected, you will enjoy full Membership benefits, including two major group exhibitions and two joint exhibitions with the Royal Society of Painter-Printmakers at Bankside Gallery each year, as well as other opportunities to exhibit and sell your work through Bankside Gallery, the RWS website, our new RWS Gallery at Whitcomb Street, and other venues. Your work will be publicised through the Society's social media, and there are opportunities to run courses, have your work used for publicity, and to become involved in Society activities.

After submission of your online application, a shortlist of applicants will be pre-selected and invited to deliver three framed, glazed paintings and a portfolio of supporting work to be judged by RWS Members. If elected, you will become an Associate Member of the RWS. Full Membership is achieved by Election at an RWS Annual General Meeting, if there is a vacancy. However, it is important to note that opportunities and privileges for both Associate and Full Members are largely the same.

This application pack contains all the information you need to know on how to apply and details regarding the election procedure. Please read through it carefully.

Good luck and we look forward to receiving your application.

Best Wishes,

Charles Williams PRWS
President of the Royal Watercolour Society

Election of RWS Associate Members 2026
Application Guidelines

Before you apply

Being elected as a member of the RWS is a long-term commitment which should not be entered into lightly. Before you apply please be aware of and understand the following:

- Annual subscription fees currently stand at £365 per annum, usually increasing in line with inflation each year. Subscription payments fall due in January each year. If you do not pay your subscription fee, your membership risks being revoked.
- RWS artists are given the opportunity to exhibit up to 4 framed works in 4 exhibitions per year, as well as having 6 mounted works in the Bankside Gallery browsers at any one time. There will also be opportunities to exhibit further works in other venues. Artists should aim to participate in all these exhibitions, particularly the two main Society shows at Bankside Gallery. If an elected artist does not exhibit in at least 2 exhibitions per year, their membership is at risk of being revoked.
- Above all, the RWS is a Membership society, and we rely on the help and input from our membership, alongside the staff team, to ensure its smooth and effective running. Whilst the exhibiting opportunities are a key part in the benefits of joining the Society, we also rely on support and input from Members with activities such as joining the Council as a Trustee, nominating yourself for an Officer role (i.e. President, Treasurer and Honorary Curator), leading educational activities such as adult workshops, marketing, and regular attendance at Society events and meetings.

Eligibility

Professional artists working in water-based media on paper or a paper-based support (including watercolour, pen & ink, gouache and acrylic – or a combination) may apply for Associate Membership of the RWS, providing they do not belong to another London watercolour society. Members are required to submit work for sale to the Society's exhibitions on a regular basis and pay annual subscription fees.

Although not essential, it is highly recommended that artists considering applying for Membership have previously exhibited in the RWS Open (formerly known as the RWS Contemporary Watercolour Competition). Submissions are closed for 2026 but will reopen for 2027 in Autumn this year. More details can be found here https://www.royalwatercoloursociety.co.uk/competition

Although international artists are eligible to apply for RWS Membership, it is expected that Members are actively involved in the Society through regularly exhibiting work in RWS exhibitions, attending in person AGMs, RWS Private Views and social events. Because of this, applicants should only consider applying if this would be possible for them.

How to Apply

1. Fill out the online application form, upload a minimum of 3 images (which should provide an overall example of your work), and pay the £60 fee by **Tuesday 5th of May 11.59pm** http://www.royalwatercoloursociety.co.uk/election/entry/
2. Wait to hear via email whether you have been shortlisted. Applicants will be notified of the shortlist by **6pm on Wednesday 20th of May**. Please check your junk folder if you have not received an email notification at the end of the day on this date.
3. If you have been shortlisted, prepare 3 framed and glazed paintings and a portfolio and deliver to the RWS Gallery at Whitcomb Street, address below on **Thursday 2nd July 12pm – 4pm.**
4. If you have not been shortlisted, then your application has been unsuccessful on this occasion.

RWS Gallery at Whitcomb Street
3-5 Whitcomb Street
London
WC2H 7HA

Shortlisted Applicants

Framed Paintings

- All 3 works must be on paper (or a paper-based support) and must have been painted within the last four years from the date of your submission.
- Your 3 paintings must be professionally framed, glazed and must not exceed 150cm x 150cm.
- Please ensure each painting is clearly labelled on the back with your name, title of the work, and medium.
- If you are elected, the RWS will choose one of your paintings (either framed or from the portfolio) for the RWS Diploma Collection. The remaining framed paintings and portfolio should be collected after the election on **Monday 6th July 12pm – 4pm.**

Portfolio

This can include a maximum of 12 finished and mounted works as well other evidence of background work; bound or collated studies, drawings or sketchbooks to support your application.
Portfolios must be clearly labelled with your name on the outside, and each item should have your name written on it in pencil.
Please do not include any additional written information such as a CV or artist statement, as all the information that the Members need is in the online application form that you will have already filled out.

Delivering Your Work

Deliver your framed paintings and portfolio to RWS Gallery at Whitcomb Street on Thursday 2nd July 12pm – 4pm. On arrival at the Gallery, you will be asked to un-wrap your paintings and sign a delivery sheet. We can store your packing material, but this must be labelled with your name if it's important you receive the same packaging back upon collection. You may arrange for a representative or professional art courier to deliver your paintings, but this must be agreed with us in advance. They must un-wrap your paintings and sign the delivery sheet on your behalf. Works will not be accepted by Royal Mail, FedEx, non-art courier or by taxi.

Please note: Great care will be taken when handling applicants' work, but the Royal Watercolour Society cannot take responsibility for any damage to, or loss of work submitted. Submission for this election implies acceptance of this disclaimer and those who are concerned are advised to insure their work.

The Election Process

The Election will take place on **Friday 3rd July** when Members of the Society carefully view each applicant's work. New Associate Members are elected by majority in a secret vote. Applicants are not required to be in attendance on this day.

Results and Collecting Your Work

Results will be sent to you via email before 6pm on Friday 3rd of July. **All Applicants should collect their work from RWS Gallery at Whitcomb Street on Monday 6th July 12pm – 4pm.**

Successful Applicants

- If you have been elected, you will still need to collect your portfolio and framed paintings **(excluding one work which will be selected for the RWS diploma collection)**. If you are unable to come to the Gallery in person, you should send a representative or engage a professional art courier. They should bring a signed letter from you authorising us to release your paintings. No work can be returned through Royal Mail, FedEx, non-art couriers, or by taxi.

Unsuccessful Applicants

- Unsuccessful applicants will need to collect your three framed paintings and portfolio. If you are unable to come to the Gallery in person, you should send a representative or engage a professional art courier. They should bring a signed letter from you authorising us to release your paintings. No work can be returned through Royal Mail, FedEx, non-art couriers, or by taxi.
- Due to the number of applicants and the nature of the election process via secret ballot, no feedback can be provided to those who are unsuccessful. All decisions are final.
- We will keep you informed of exhibitions, events and elections, and welcome you to apply again in the future; the standard of entry is very high, and many valued Members were not elected on their first attempt.

New Associate Members

- Newly elected Associates will receive a letter from the RWS President welcoming them to the Society. They will also be sent a registration pack confirming the details of their Associate Membership and requesting a payment of £225 to cover part of the annual subscription up until 2026. The annual subscription fee, billed on 1 January, is currently £365 for 2026 and usually increases annually in line with inflation.

Dates

Tuesday 5th May 11.59pm | Application Deadline
Wednesday 20th May by 6pm | Applicants will be notified as to whether they have been shortlisted on or before this date
Thursday 2nd July 12pm – 4pm | Shortlisted applicants deliver work to RWS Gallery at Whitcomb Street (address below)
Friday 3rd July | Election Day
Friday 3rd July | Results sent via email by 6pm
Monday 6th July 12pm – 4pm | All applicants collect artworks and portfolios from RWS Gallery at Whitcomb Street (address below)

RWS Gallery at Whitcomb Street
3-5 Whitcomb Street
London
WC2H 7HA