

RECRUITMENT PACK

Trustee

April 2026



WELCOME



Thank you for your interest in the role of Trustee of Hackney Empire.

Hackney Empire is a landmark venue recognised nationally for our work with young people and young artists, and our commitment to championing global majority creatives. We have recently appointed a new executive team, with Chris Sudworth as CEO and Julia Mattingley as Director of Operations & Commercial and have secured a National Lottery Heritage Fund development grant. As such, we are looking forward to a period of growth and development forging new creative, community and business partnerships; becoming more central to the cultural narrative locally, in London and nationally.

For almost 125 years, Hackney Empire has been a much-loved home for the people of Hackney, East London and beyond to come and share experiences together in our theatre. In 2025 we welcomed over 150,000 people through our doors to enjoy everything art and culture has to offer: from comedy to opera, theatre to live music, world-class dance, spoken word and community events. 2025 was also a record-breaking year for our legendary pantomime, in which we welcomed 45,000 audience members, an increase of 8% on 2024. We are proud to be an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

The current board is well-skilled in areas such as finance, strategic/business planning, entrepreneurialism, fundraising, young people's engagement, legal, government policy and communications/marketing.

At this exciting stage in our development, we are looking for up to 3 new Trustees who share our values, have strong strategic and advocacy skills and experience in one or more of these areas: arts management/venue operations, fundraising, legal, buildings/heritage projects, strategic digital/social media expertise. We also wish to diversify membership of the Board, with a particular focus on members of the disabled community and people whose lived experience or heritage reflects the communities we serve.

If you are as comfortable rising to a challenge as you are celebrating success, and if you enjoy working with an Executive Team, we'd love to hear from you. Details of the Trustee role, selection procedure and links to further information are included in the pack.

Please let us know if you have any access requirements or would like the information in another format by emailing recruitment@hackneyempire.co.uk or calling 020 8510 4507.

If you would like a confidential and informal discussion about the position before expressing interest, please contact the Chair of the Nominations Committee, Karin Gartzke. She is contactable on recruitment@hackneyempire.co.uk and she will be pleased to set up a time to talk with you.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sir William Atkinson
Chair

ABOUT HACKNEY EMPIRE

"The Hackney, as the people of the area affectionately called the Hackney Empire, was a variety theatre – a Music Hall. However, the Hackney Empire was not just any old Music Hall – certainly not! The Hackney was a gem, a joy and a pleasure to see and to go to... found in the heart of the East End of London not too far from where I was born and used to live."

Charles S P Jenkins

Hackney Empire is a world-renowned, Grade II* listed, Edwardian music hall, and now a modern variety theatre presenting and championing the best in local, national, and international arts and culture in all its forms. Designed by Frank Matcham and built in 1901, the theatre was fully restored in 2003 and is currently scoping further restoration with the support of National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2027/28. The glorious and ornate auditorium can accommodate upwards of 1,200 audience members, making it one of the capital's largest venues outside of the West End. Hackney Empire is often referred to as one of the most beautiful theatres in the country and was recently ranked 1st in Time Out's "11 Most Beautiful Theatres" article.

Hackney Empire has a legacy as a cultural beacon and safe space which annually welcomes over 150,000 audience members - an audience that fully reflects the incredible diversity and vibrancy of London's communities. For decades Hackney Empire has been regarded as a vital and exceptional platform for Black, Asian and global majority creatives, artists and audiences, and has a proud legacy of supporting marginalised and isolated voices. This legacy continues to this day as a central element of the organisation's mission.

More information about Hackney Empire can be found at www.hackneyempire.co.uk



PROGRAMME

Hackney Empire offers a uniquely diverse and dynamic programme that spans a wide breadth and variety of genres – a single week's activities can include anything from opera, community productions, theatre, dance, film shoots, and podcasts to performances from the world's best comedians and bands.

Our variety programme has recently welcomed companies and artists such as Acosta Danza, Ballet Black, the opening run of new West End production *I'm Every Woman: The Chaka Khan Musical*, James Acaster, Nish Kumar, podcasts with Lily Allen, Miquita Oliver and Dan Carter, and music artists Robyn, Maggie Rogers, Mac DeMarco, and The Pogues. We also host and collaborate with a range of touring productions, and enjoy production partnerships with The Belgrade Coventry, Bristol Old Vic and English Touring Opera; producing our own critically acclaimed annual pantomime.

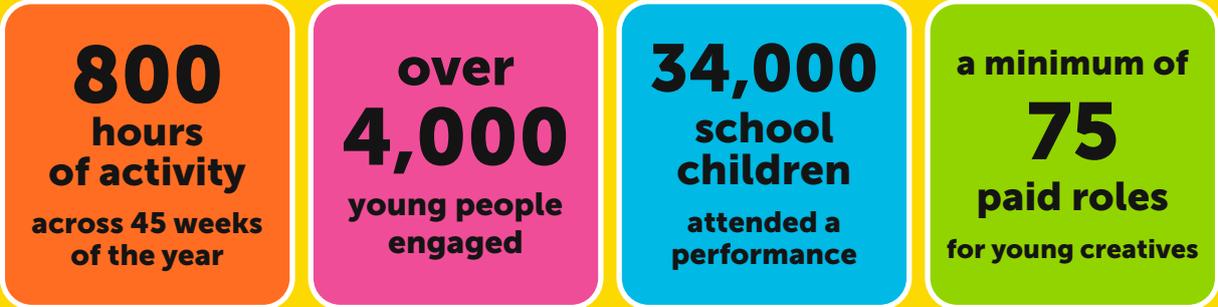
In 2025 we hosted numerous shows from and for specific communities, including Qawwali concerts, Latin ballet, Ukrainian plays, Jamaican comedies, Orthodox Jewish performances, as well as events to mark Windrush Day and Refugee Week. Hackney Empire also gave away over 2,500 free tickets last year to local community groups via Tickets for Good.



CREATIVE FUTURES

Learning and Participation runs through everything we do at Hackney Empire. Our engagement programmes are specifically designed with our local communities in mind, and developed in collaboration with our stakeholders through a range of consultation, partnership working and co-creation. Young people’s voices are integrated into programme design and delivery through our Young Producers Programme, Young Board R&D group, Associate Artists and Trainee programmes. Being deeply connected to our local community, and creating space for participants to tell us what they need from Hackney Empire is central to how we work. Inclusivity and access, collaboration, care and integrity are guiding principles for us.

Our ambitious programme of work has multiple entry points, and we pride ourselves on being able to journey with participants from initial light touch engagement projects in school, right through to professional performance opportunities and leadership roles. We work with primary, secondary, FE and HE settings through our Outreach strand of work; young people aged 14 to 19 and early-career artists through Creative Futures; and older community members through the Hackney Empire Community Choir. We are locally focussed with connections across London and nationwide, ensuring that we are both Hackney specific, and nationally recognised.



All activity is provided free of charge to reduce financial barriers to access.

Our progression model works in stages. Participants can move through all four steps or enter and engage at whatever level meets their needs and wishes.



Across **19** Programmes -

78 paid opportunities for young participants/early careers artists who had been one of our young people

“ Being on ADP showed me how theatre works. Now, I can use that experience to move forward with confidence. Hackney Empire has developed my leadership skills and musicianship. It’s really great to have people who have had faith in me - now I can have faith in myself, and take these opportunities.” **Mark**, a young person involved in our 2025 production of *Romeo & Juliet*



VISION, MISSION & VALUES

Vision

We're here to ignite change, champion community and empower young people.

Mission

We will run a transformative creative programme for young people, from primary school to job placement.

We will lead the way in variety entertainment, offering high quality shows and events that are popular and relevant to our communities.

We will be a theatre where everyone feels welcome and leaves knowing that there is something for them at Hackney Empire.

Values

BRAVERY: We believe that great stories come from anywhere and anyone, and we will always be brave and give a platform to variety.

OPPORTUNITY: Young people from our communities deserve opportunity and we will always make space for them to find theirs.

RESPECT: We respect that everyone who walks through our doors is on their own journey and we're grateful to be a part of that.

REPRESENTATION, ACCESS & INCLUSION

Hackney Empire is committed to promoting equity, inclusion and representation in all areas of our work; we are opposed to all forms of discrimination, direct or indirect.

Hackney Empire's aim is to provide an inclusive and supportive environment for all of our employees, participants, audiences, artists, patrons, clients and all other people with whom we engage to produce and present our programme; deliver our services; and to ensure legal diligence and internal best practice.

"Coming to Hackney Empire changed my life. I came here dreaming of doing this kind of work because I didn't have access to it growing up. Through Take the Lead and Compulsory Subjects I not only gained the confidence and tools to be able to start holding spaces and devising projects - but also the belief in myself to stand on my own two feet. Now that I'm working in the Learning & Participation department, I'm learning everyday what it means to foster community and getting to be a part of impact that I didn't even know was possible."

Nadia Musah



ACHIEVEMENTS & AMBITIONS

With only about 11% of our turnover coming from public subsidy, our business model is by necessity dynamic and responsive to programming trends whilst maintaining popular favourites. In 2025 we achieved the highest number of overall bookers in our history, 39,963, which was a 6,000 increase on 2024, and our highest ever number of first-time bookers at over 30,000. Our digital engagement continues to rise, with our Instagram followers alone rising from 6,000 to 12,000 followers from 2021-2024 and to over 16,000 from 2024-present.

Developing creative strategic partnerships enables us to broaden our reach and widen our opportunities to present and amplify excellent, challenging and often ignored narratives.

In 2025, Hackney Empire partnered with the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry and Bristol Old Vic to present a musical re-telling of *Romeo and Juliet*, scored with original Rap and R&B. In 2026, we hosted the technical rehearsals and premiere performances of new West End production, *I'm Every Woman: The Chaka Khan Musical*, welcoming almost 6,000 audience members. We are looking forward to exciting co-productions starting to take shape for 2027 & 2028.

From October 2026, we will begin a year of celebrations and ambitious arts and heritage projects, in line with our 125th anniversary.

We have made significant progress towards reducing our carbon footprint, and Hackney Empire remains a committed signatory to the London Borough of Hackney's Responsible Business Charter. Since installing 76 photovoltaic solar panels in 2023, we have generated over 69,000 kWh of electricity through these panels, and we are continuing to monitor the system's output to improve their efficacy. We have also successfully completed our first production adhering to the Theatre Green Book's 'Basic' standard, and have taken steps to improve our operational sustainability, increasing our recycling, reducing our digital footprint, and increasing our plant-based offering in the bars. We have replaced approximately 75% of our lighting in the auditorium with LED, and are working towards upgrading our building management system to improve efficiency and reduce energy usage.

FINANCIALS

Hackney Empire is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and partners with the London Borough of Hackney on specific projects with social impact for the borough's communities, attracting additional support from Trusts, Foundations and individual donors in recognition of the value of our work.

Hackney Empire is in a sustainable financial position following careful building of both restricted and unrestricted reserves.

For the latest set of financial accounts please [click here](#).



RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

In line with Charity Commission guidance and Hackney Empire's legal responsibilities, Trustees together form the Board of Hackney Empire, and have the following general responsibilities and duties:

- Ensuring the charity is for the public benefit
- Complying with Hackney Empire's governing document and the law (e.g. Annual Returns)
- Acting in the charity's best interests
- Managing the charity's resources responsibly
- Acting with reasonable care and skill
- Ensuring that the charity is accountable
- Providing leadership through regularly reviewing strategic aims
- Setting overall policy guidelines and policies
- Evaluating performance
- Managing conflicts of interests and annual declarations
- Maintaining a risk register
- Safeguarding
- Health and Safety
- Supporting equity, diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation, including the Board.



SKILLS & EXPERIENCE

Candidates will demonstrate a number of these core skills, areas of experience or knowledge:

- A track record of successful achievement in your field, which will command the respect of fellow Board members, the staff, customers, funding bodies and the performing arts profession
- A commitment to the values and aspirations of Hackney Empire and its place within the community, and the local, London nations and culture ecology
- Lived experience and/or heritage that reflects the communities we serve
- A willingness to “roll one’s sleeves up”, actively supporting management and contributing to delivering agreed objectives
- The ability to network and make the case for culture, supporting the Executive team in fundraising, lobbying, championing Hackney Empire, liaising with key funders
- A commitment to good corporate governance
- An understanding of strategy, financial planning and/or the legal context within which Hackney Empire operates
- A passion for theatre, and an understanding of arts buildings, the theatre industry and funding bodies, or a willingness to learn more about them
- Understanding or experience of heritage projects or buildings
- An understanding of the principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and how to achieve good practice
- Awareness of or commitment to learn best practice in relation to Safeguarding and Child Protection

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The Trustees meet five times a year: four Board meetings, typically held in March, May, September and November, in addition to an annual Board Away Day, to be held this year in June. Attendance is also requested but not mandatory at significant dates across the Hackney Empire calendar, such as major Press Nights and donor events.

A Finance Committee is in place to ensure a close overview of the financial position of the organisation, a Development Committee supports the Executive team to secure partnerships and resources to support the organisation’s success, and a Nominations Committee identifies, evaluates, and recommends candidates for appointment to the Board, ensuring effective governance. These committees meet separately, and report into, the Board of Trustees.

CURRENT BOARD MEMBERS

David Adams has over 40 years' experience in consumer facing business. A qualified accountant, he served as Finance Director for a number of major UK retailers. He chairs Hackney Empire's Finance Committee.

Sir William Atkinson (Chair) is recognised as having been one of the UK's most respected headteachers. He is adviser to a wide range of national and local bodies and has extensive experience of chairing organisations within the Arts Sector.

Josette Bushell Mingo OBE is an award-winning actor and director who has been Principal of The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama since 2021.

Richard Etienne is a senior communications specialist with extensive experience in local and international campaigning to a target audience, including the execution of multi-channel marketing campaigns.

Jasmyn Fisher-Ryner is a Theatre and Digital Producer and Events Consultant. She has worked with organisations including Royal Court Theatre and The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Karin Gartzke is an experienced arts management consultant with a comprehensive understanding of the performing arts industry and venue operations, both subsidised and commercial.

Soheb Panja is an experienced writer, editor and communications specialist. He is co-founder of Courier magazine, and later set up Field7, a new media platform for people working on climate solutions.

Rebecca Preston currently leads the Advancement & Alumni team at the Royal College of Art. Prior to this she headed up the Development/Fundraising teams of two major arts organisations.

Matthew Roeser has over 30 years of C-suite, investment banking, fund management, start-up, and board experience.

Roger Woolfe has been a solicitor in a private practice with a central London firm for over 50 years, with 13 years as a senior partner, and still practises as a part time consultant.

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

The Trustees oversee the business of Hackney Empire Limited, the charitable company that operates and has a long lease of the theatre at a peppercorn rent.

The board delegates the day-to-day running of Hackney Empire to the Chief Executive, Chris Sudworth. Chris joined Hackney Empire from Birmingham Hippodrome in January 2026, following Jo Hemmant's successful 13-year tenure.

Hackney Empire Trading Limited is a wholly owned trading subsidiary, which is in operation to generate commercial income for the benefit of the parent charity. This company has four distinct areas of activity:

- Optimisation of commercial opportunities such as photo shoots and film work
- Operation of the theatre bars
- Service contract with third party suppliers to run the Empire Tavern, an all-day bar and dining operation
- Production company producing commissioned pieces of theatre, including the annual pantomime.

There are currently approximately 30 full time or equivalent staff, plus a valued team of casual and freelance personnel.

TERMS OF OFFICE

Trustees must be 18 years or over, and their initial 4-year term of office concludes at the fourth AGM following the commencement of their appointment. Trustees may be reappointed for a further term of 4 years.

In exceptional circumstances, a Trustee who has served office for two consecutive terms may be appointed for a consecutive third term.

HOW TO APPLY

You are encouraged to contact the Chair of the Nominations Committee for an informal and confidential conversation before expressing interest. She can be contacted via recruitment@hackneyempire.co.uk, or at 020 8510 4507.

In order to make an expression of interest please provide:

- A letter, of no more than two pages, setting out your interest in the role with examples of how you meet the requirements of the specification. You should demonstrate how your experience relates to the particular responsibilities and skills that you believe make you suitable for the role. This may include work you have done in a voluntary capacity and experience you have gained in other fields that you feel are relevant.
- A CV
- A completed Equal Opportunities Form

The Equal Opportunities Form will be separated from expressions of interest before your application is considered by the Nominations Committee.

Expressions of interest should be addressed to Karin Gartzke, Chair of the Nominations Committee and sent to recruitment@hackneyempire.co.uk before 10am on Monday 27th April 2026 with "Hackney Empire Trustee" in the subject line.

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to meet with the Chair of Hackney Empire, the Chair of the Nominations Committee, and, separately, the Executive Team. Dates to be confirmed – but likely to be in the week of 11th May 2026.

The successful candidate will subsequently be invited to meet other Trustees.

The successful candidate will be expected to complete an application to the Disclosure and Barring Service before appointment to the Board of Hackney Empire can be confirmed.