

WEST  DEAN



# **Director of Finance**

Candidate Pack

Spring 2025

# A Warm Welcome



West Dean stands at an exciting crossroads, blending our rich heritage with an ambitious vision for the future. Our unique campus in the South Downs, featuring a historic house and stunning gardens, continues to inspire thousands of visitors

annually. Meanwhile, our London campus in Bloomsbury opens up new possibilities for growth and innovation. This is truly an exciting time to join us as we embark on dynamic and credible plans for growth in both Sussex and London.

At West Dean, we offer an unparalleled educational experience. From the conservation of artefacts to fine arts, creative writing, and design, our courses span a wide spectrum of creative disciplines. What sets us apart is not only the expertise of our tutors but also the flexibility of our programmes, allowing students to tailor their learning journey to their needs. Our founder, Edward James, envisioned West Dean as a nurturing ground for creativity and crafts. Today, we are expanding on that vision, embracing sustainability and innovation while preserving our core values.

We are seeking a Director of Finance who will be instrumental in shaping our financial future and operational efficiency. This role is crucial in creating a solid foundation upon which West Dean can grow, providing strategic and financial guidance to ensure that our educational commitments are met, and our ambitious business objectives are attained.

West Dean operates with c. 275 employees supported by 10 trustees for the Edward James Foundation, and over 50 volunteers. This workforce supports West Dean's educational programmes, estate management, and conservation initiatives across its operations. West Dean operates at significant scale with an annual turnover of £14.4 million (2023), overseeing a robust balance sheet underpinned by £144.1 million in net assets including £104.4 million in property investments and £12.7 million in managed financial investments. While maintaining substantial reserves and a diversified asset base, West Dean has navigated post-pandemic challenges through four consecutive annual deficits (£3.1 million in 2023), necessitating strategic financial leadership as part of our three-year Stabilisation Plan to return to surplus. The Director of Finance will steward these resources while addressing complex financial realities, balancing our commitment to world-class arts education with sustainable recovery in a landscape of evolving market conditions and inflationary pressures.

# A Warm Welcome

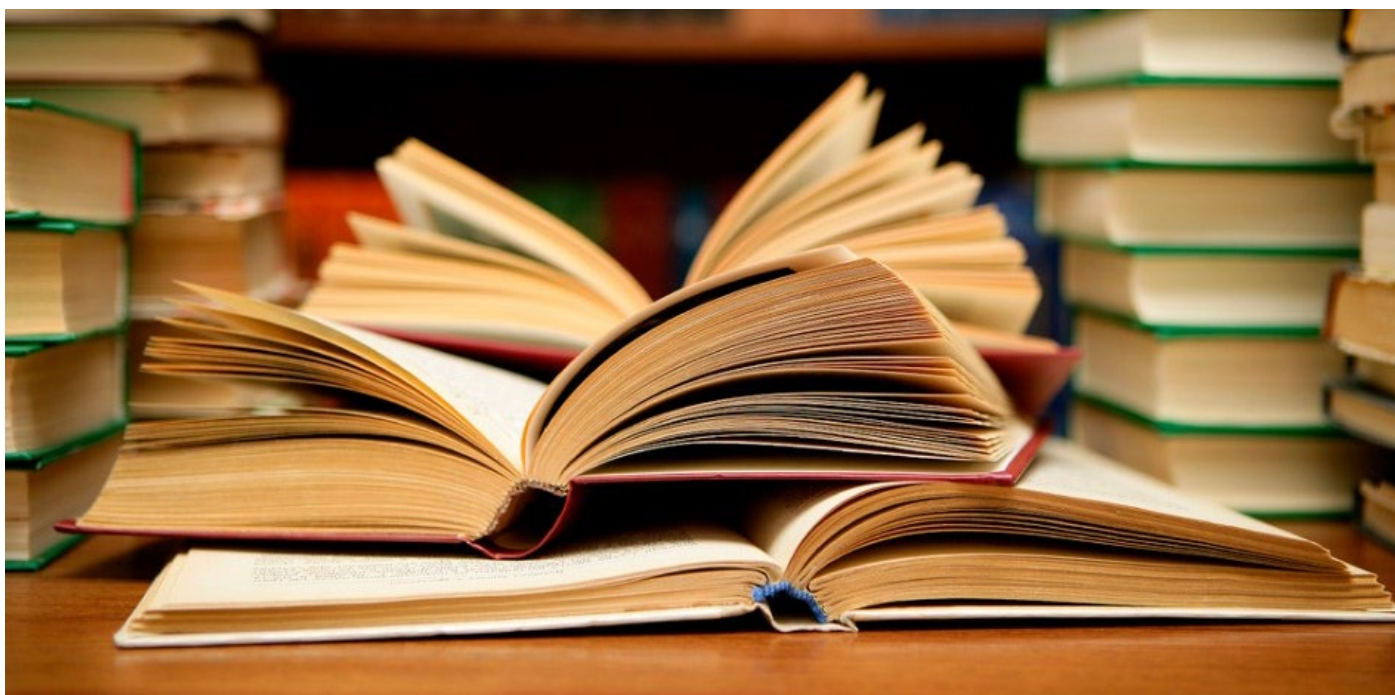
The ideal candidate will be a dynamic leader with strong financial acumen and strategic vision. You will join our Executive Leadership Team, contributing to our overall strategy while overseeing our finances. We are looking for someone who can balance traditional financial management with forward-thinking approaches to support our unique educational model and preserve our heritage. This is an exciting opportunity to make a significant impact at West Dean. Your expertise will help us navigate the complexities of modern education finance while honouring our commitment to creativity, crafts, and conservation.

We are committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment and welcome applications from all backgrounds. We are also open to discussing flexible working arrangements, including hybrid options, for the right candidate.

If you are inspired by the prospect of applying your financial expertise to support education in the arts, design, crafts, and conservation, we would love to hear from you. This role offers a unique chance to blend financial stewardship with the preservation of cultural heritage and the nurturing of creative talent.

For an informal discussion about this exciting role or the recruitment process, please contact Alan Walter on 07876 766972, or email [alan@dixonwalter.co.uk](mailto:alan@dixonwalter.co.uk). We look forward to exploring how your skills and experience could contribute to making a better world at West Dean.

Professor Anna Gough-Yates  
Chief Executive





# About West Dean

West Dean is a unique institution that combines one of the UK's foremost specialist creative arts and conservation colleges with an extensive country estate and stunning gardens set in the beautiful South Downs National Park, along with a recently opened campus in Bloomsbury, London. The College provides an extensive array of creative subjects, all taught to the highest standards. It offers undergraduate and master's degrees in fields such as Fine Art, Conservation, and Design, complemented by a distinguished programme of short courses led by prominent art and craft practitioners.

Among its many specialised facilities, the College features one of Europe's premier fine art tapestry studios. Established in 1976, the studio has collaborated with renowned artists to produce large-scale tapestries, including a series of 23 works by Henry Moore created between 1976 and 1987, as well as recent projects with contemporary artists such as Tracey Emin, Eva Rothschild, Martin Creed, and Michael Armitage. These tapestries are exhibited in leading galleries and museums worldwide.

West Dean also houses a significant and diverse art collection, primarily centred around Surrealism and 20th-century art. This collection includes artworks, manuscripts, and letters from prominent 20th-century artists and cultural figures, with a particular focus on the legacy of Edward James, who was an influential patron of the arts. Notable pieces include paintings by Leonora Carrington, Salvador Dalí, Leonor Fini, and René Magritte, as well as furniture and fabrics commissioned from leading interior designers. This rich artistic heritage enhances the College's educational environment while preserving its historical significance in both traditional and modern art forms.

The world-class West Dean Gardens attract many thousands of visitors each year while the wider estate covers 6,500 acres of arable land, woodland, and forest, including eleven farms and over 100 cottages. The Foundation has ambitious sustainability plans that include planting half a million trees and developing its own food produce line with the aim of making West Dean Climate Neutral by 2030. West Dean is also moving forward with capital development plans in Sussex as part of its vision for boosting student numbers and enhancing visitor experiences on the estate.



# About The Role



The Director of Finance will play a pivotal role in shaping the financial strategy and operational efficiency of West Dean. The Director will report to the Chief Executive and be a member of the Executive Leadership Team while working closely with the Trustees of the Edward James Foundation. The postholder will provide strategic financial leadership, ensure robust financial governance, and oversee all aspects of financial operations. Additionally, the Director of Finance will support the legacy final salary pension scheme.

This is an exciting opportunity to contribute to the long-term growth, efficiency, and success of an organisation dedicated to education, cultural heritage, and sustainability.

## Key Responsibilities

### *Strategic Financial Leadership*

- As a key member of the Executive Leadership Team, actively contribute to setting and delivering West Dean's overall strategy.
- Foster collaborative relationships with colleagues across all departments.
- Serve as a professional role model, inspiring confidence and respect among staff at all levels, while driving financial and operational excellence.
- Develop and implement the Foundation's financial strategy in alignment with its broader organisational goals.
- Act as principal advisor to the Chief Executive, Trustees, and Executive Leadership Team on financial matters.
- Drive the financial planning process ensuring long-term sustainability, operational excellence, and growth.
- Provide strategic input into major organisational decisions, including capital projects resource allocation, technology investments, operational improvements, and investment opportunities.
- Lead comprehensive business analysis and scenario planning to inform strategic decision-making, developing financial models that assess multiple market conditions and organizational responses. This includes stress-testing financial resilience through best/worst-case projections and sensitivity analyses linked to key performance drivers, while collaborating with cross-functional stakeholders to align scenarios with operational realities.

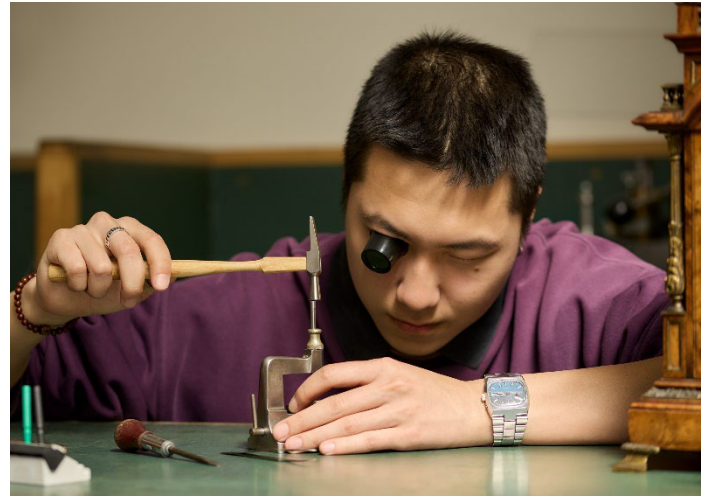
# About The Role

## *Financial Governance and Compliance*

- Oversee preparation of the Annual Accounts while interfacing with external/internal auditors.
- Ensure compliance with statutory obligations including Charity Commission requirements, HMRC guidelines, and sector-specific frameworks.
- Prepare accurate financial reports for presentation to the Board of Trustees and Finance & Audit Committee.
- Support the legacy final salary pension scheme, and advise the Board on pension matters, attend meetings of the Pension Trustees and liaise with the pension administrator.
- Safeguard Foundation assets through appropriate financial controls, policies and risk management frameworks.
- Oversee risk management frameworks ensuring sound financial policies are in place.

## *Financial Operations*

- Oversee preparation of annual budgets forecasts and management accounts.
- Monitor financial performance providing analysis and actionable recommendations to senior stakeholders.
- Ensure effective cash flow, treasury management, investments and oversight of scholarship accounts.
- Ensure timely preparation and submission of statutory returns, including VAT, tax filings, and regulatory body reports.



## *Stakeholder Engagement*

- Build and maintain strong relationships with external stakeholders, including auditors, funders, banks, regulatory bodies and technology partners.
- Represent the organisation in discussions regarding finance operations with donors, grant providers, and other partners.
- Act as Secretary to Trustees' Finance and Audit Committee, ensuring effective governance reporting.

## *Team Leadership & Development*

- Lead, inspire and develop the Finance team, fostering collaboration, accountability and continuous improvement.
- Provide mentorship and professional development opportunities for team members.
- Foster a positive team culture within the Finance department, supporting professional growth, well-being, and performance, collaborating with the People team for best practices in recruitment and staff development.
- Promote cross-functional collaboration between finance, IT and other operational departments.



# About The Role

## *Data Protection & Information Management*

- Implement data protection policies across financial systems.
- Oversee information management strategies supporting decision-making reporting.

## *Professional Development & Sector Awareness*

- Stay informed about financial trends, innovations and regulatory changes in the charity and education sectors.
- Ensure the organisation adopts best practices in financial management governance.

## *General Responsibilities*

- Undertake any other reasonable tasks as directed by the Chief Executive.
- Act as an ambassador for the Foundation, promoting its values and objectives.
- Promote Health & Safety compliance within Finance team related operations and represent the Finance department at relevant committees and meetings.



# About The Person

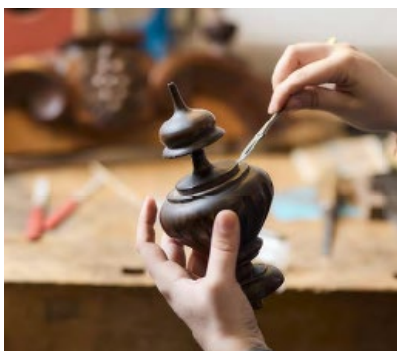
We realise not every candidate will have direct experience of all these areas. Candidates would ideally fit as many of the criteria below as possible.

## Experience

- Proven ability to operate at strategic level, collaborating effectively within the Executive Leadership Team - *Essential*.
- Proven experience in senior financial leadership roles - *Essential*.
- Strong track record managing finance functions within comparable organisations - *Essential*.
- Experience within charity or higher education sectors - *Desirable*.
- Demonstrable experience managing audit processes, preparing for external audits, coordinating auditors, and overseeing statutory reporting requirements - *Essential*.

## Skills & Competencies

- High-level analytical skills with strategic oversight capabilities - *Essential*.
- Strong interpersonal skills able to engage across all levels - *Essential*.
- Expertise in financial management systems solutions - *Essential*.
- Excellent verbal written communication skills - *Essential*.
- Ability to translate complex financial technical concepts for non-specialist audiences - *Essential*.



## Personal Attributes

- Collaborative leadership style focused on team empowerment - *Essential*.
- Open-mindedness towards innovation in financial practices - *Essential*.
- Commitment to advancing equality diversity and inclusion - *Essential*.
- Adaptability and resilience with managing change - *Essential*.
- Strong interpersonal skills, building positive relationships across all levels - *Essential*.
- Approachable, supportive mentoring style encouraging professional growth - *Essential*.
- Ability balance strategic thinking hands-on problem-solving - *Essential*.
- Commitment to fostering a culture of trust, transparency and open communication - *Essential*.

## Qualifications

- Professional accounting qualification (e.g., ACA/ACCA/CIMA) - *Essential*.
- Relevant degree qualification or equivalent experience in Finance Business Administration or a related field - *Essential*.
- Project Management or IT governance certifications (e.g., PRINCE2 ITIL) - *Desirable*.





# How to Apply



To find out more about this exceptional opportunity, please contact Alan Walter on 07876 766972, email [alan@dixonwalter.co.uk](mailto:alan@dixonwalter.co.uk).

Further information and details about how to apply can be found here: [Finance Director - Further Information](#)

Applications should be made via email to [alan@dixonwalter.co.uk](mailto:alan@dixonwalter.co.uk) and must include on separate documents:

- letter of application setting out your interest in the role and details of how you match the person specification
- a comprehensive curriculum vitae (CV)
- details of three referees and notice period (referees will not be contacted without your permission)
- a completed Personal Details Form (available above)

Closing date for applications is Midnight on **Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2025**.

Preliminary interviews will take place with Dixon Walter via MS teams from **w/c Monday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2025**.

Final interviews will take place at West Dean College from week commencing **28<sup>th</sup> April 2025**.

*Please note that the dates above are indicative and may be subject to change.*