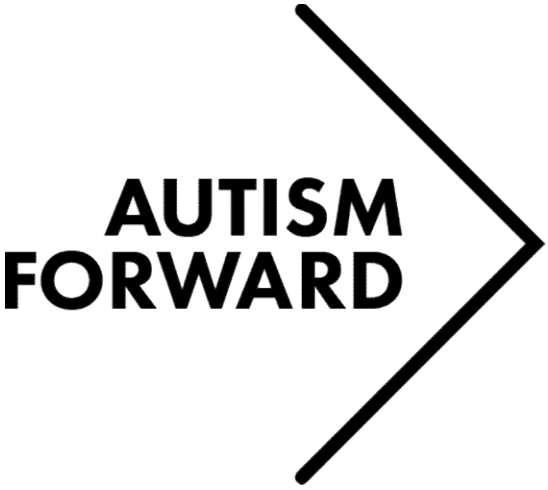
Charity registration number: 1171704



AUTISM FORWARD

ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

AUTISM FORWARD

CONTENTS

Reference and Administrative Details	1
Trustees' Report	2 to 16
Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities	17
Independent Examiner's Report	18 to 19
Statement of Financial Activities	20
Balance Sheet	21
Notes to the Financial Statements	22 to 27

AUTISM FORWARD

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Trustees	Ms A Leverett Ms J Pierce Dr E Gokcen Ms H Needham
Principal Office	37 Granville Park London SE13 7DY
Charity Registration Number	1171704
Website	www.autismforward.org.uk
Bankers	Metro Bank PLC One Southampton Row London WC1B 5HA
Independent Examiner	Rotherham Taylor Limited 21 Navigation Business Village Navigation Way Ashton-on-Ribble Preston PR2 2YP

TRUSTEES' REPORT

The trustees present the annual report together with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2026.

The financial statements have been prepared on an accruals basis in accordance with the accounting policies set out in the notes to the financial statements and comply with the charity's constitution, Charities Act 2011 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their financial statements in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland published on 16 July 2014. The financial statements have been examined by an Independent Examiner.

THE TRUSTEES

The trustees who served the charity during the period were as follows:

Jane Pierce (Chair and Secretary)

Ann Leverett (Treasurer)

Elif Gokcen

Helen Needham

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered number 117104 and is constituted under a Foundation Constitution which came into force on 20 February 2017. Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen were the three co-founders of the charity and were all reappointed for a further period of 3 years commencing on 23 January 2026. Helen Needham was appointed as a trustee on 20 October 2020 and was reappointed for a further period of 3 years commencing on 1 November 2023.

New trustees are appointed by the existing trustees and in selecting individuals for appointment as charity trustees, the trustees must have regard to the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the charity. The Constitution provides for a minimum of 3 trustees and there is no maximum. Trustees are eligible for reappointment at the end of their term.

As the charity is primarily a grant-making charity, it does not have any paid employees and all fundraising and administrative work is undertaken by the trustees. The trustees attend external training courses as necessary and appropriate for their responsibilities and roles within the charity.

All trustees are required to read the Charity Commission's guidance "The Essential Trustee: What you need to know" and the new Charity Commission Governance Code.

The trustees aim to meet at least once every quarter to discuss fundraising, finances, governance issues, events, new mentor partnerships or initiatives with other autism charities or potential corporate sponsors and to confirm approval of grants. The day to day administration of grants and the processing of applications is handled by the Chair and Secretary. A Grant Approval Sub-Committee was established by unanimous agreement of the trustees on 20 October 2020 and currently comprises three trustees (Ann Leverett, Jane Pierce and Elif Gokcen) which approves grant applications and grant extensions in accordance with its terms of reference (as amended in writing and approved by the trustees from time to time). Details of all grants and grant extensions approved by the Grant Approval Sub-Committee are made available to all trustees and are presented at each board meeting.

All trustees give their time freely and no trustee remuneration was paid in the year and no expenses were claimed by them. Trustees are required to disclose all relevant interests and register them with the charity secretary in accordance with the charity's Conflict of Interest Policy and withdraw from any decisions where a conflict of interest arises. No disclosures have been made by the Trustees since the charity was constituted.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The trustees have considered the major risks to which the charity is exposed and have reviewed those risks and established systems and procedures to manage those risks which are set out in the charity's Risk Management Strategy which is reviewed by the Treasurer annually. This contains procedures to ensure the Charity is complying with the Charity Commission guidance in relation to due diligence procedures in relation to beneficiaries, donors and partners.

The charity is primarily a grant making charity and it raises funds to provide grants for specialist employment related mentoring and workshops for autistic adults who are actively seeking paid or voluntary employment. The mentoring and workshops are provided by independent specialist mentors who have proven experience of providing employment related mentoring to autistic adults. The mentor partners are entirely independent of the charity and the charity carries out due diligence in relation to each proposed mentor partner in accordance with the Charity Commission "Know Your Partner" guidelines to verify their experience, good standing and suitability. The charity also enters into a Referral Agreement with each proposed mentor partner which sets out the process for referring grant applications to the charity and the rights and obligations of the mentor partner and the charity in relation to the mentoring services which are funded by grants provided by the charity.

The charity has put in place processes to obtain regular feedback from grant holders and mentors in relation to the mentoring provided and their progress to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes and demonstrate the public benefit derived from the funding of the specialist mentoring and workshops. The charity also reviews each mentor partner annually to check they continue to meet the good standing and other relevant requirements of the "Know Your Partner" guidelines.

The charity is currently working with thirteen independent specialist mentor partners across the country. We have added two new mentor organisations to our network this financial year to expand our geographical reach.

The charity's surplus funds are divided between the charity's business saving account at Metro Bank plc, the charity's business saving account with the Nationwide Building Society account, the charity's deposit account with United Trust Bank and a new 31 day Business Notice Account with Cambridge & Counties Bank in order to benefit from the FSCS compensation scheme with all four financial institutions, minimising the charity's financial exposure. All payments made by the charity from its bank and building society accounts require authorisation by two trustees (except where withdrawals can only be made into the Metro Bank account, which requires authorisation by two trustees for any withdrawal).

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT

The objects of the charity are the promotion of social inclusion for the public benefit amongst people aged eighteen or over who are excluded from society, or parts of society, due to an autism spectrum condition, to relieve the needs of such people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential as individuals after they leave education, in particular but not exclusively through funding the provision of:

(a) pre-employment support, including social skills and other relevant training which enhances employability;

(b) coaching, mentoring, advice and support in relation to employability;

(c) providing specialist skills and awareness training and workshops relating to employability;

(d) facilitating access to a range of social and leisure activities; and

(e) action to increase public and employer awareness of such disabilities and conditions and promote steps that can be taken to facilitate such social inclusion through employment.

The trustees confirm that they have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives and planning future activities and setting the grant making policy for the charity.

The charity carries out these objects by:

(a) providing grants to autistic adults to allow them to access specialist mentoring and/or workshops to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion by accessing clubs, groups, workshops and work placements;

(b) providing information and resources for autistic people and employers on its website, including details of specialist mentors offering one-to-one support and/or workshops to autistic people to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and links to other websites and resources;

(c) raising awareness among employers of the needs and strengths of autistic employees and providing advice and signposting services with the aim of increasing access to employment for autistic people and creating more inclusive workplaces; and

(d) liaising with universities and colleges to raise awareness of the charity's services for autistic students upon graduation and other initiatives which can improve employment outcomes for autistic students.

Our approach ensures that mentoring support is provided on a one to one basis, with regularity and consistency by a mentor who has lived and/or professional experience supporting autistic people into employment with the right adjustments. Support is also given to help access benefits, social activities, training and navigate social expectations at work. We do not have a set timeframe or timetable for support, the mentor will tailor this to the needs of the individual. We can generally extend support until the individual has achieved their employment goals or is equipped to pursue them without further support and often our clients continue to work with the same mentor once they are in employment, funded by Access to Work or the employer.

The specialist mentoring funded by the charity enables autistic people to prepare for, find and maintain suitable employment which improves their independence and social inclusion. On average, over the last eight years, including the two years when covid restrictions applied, 80% of the autistic job seekers we have supported have secured paid or voluntary employment (60% paid and 20% voluntary), maintaining the excellent results achieved last year. The impressive outcomes for our beneficiaries, as set out in further detail in section 8 of this report, demonstrate the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support we fund. The qualitative feedback shows the broad nature of the support which goes above and beyond employment related support, helping our clients to access benefits, training, social activities and to develop strategies to help them cope with the barriers they face in a world that is not yet adapted for autistic people.

We always seek to ensure that the support we fund is in line with the requirements and values of the autistic community and we recognise the importance of including autistic people at all levels of our organisation. Helen Needham, who is autistic herself, joined our Board of Trustees in 2020 and an increasing number of the specialist employment mentors we work with are also neurodivergent. We seek regular feedback from the autistic job seekers we support to ensure that the support we fund is of value to them. We also use our social media and newsletters to promote the work and events of autistic and neurodivergent led organisations. We also fund regular Peer Support meetings which are run by our mentor partner, AS Mentoring and continue to fund the successful Culture Club (previously called the Movie Club) for Autism Forward clients in Brighton run by our mentor partner Karen-Anne Manghan of ASC Key Mentoring, who meet on a weekly basis to discuss a wide range of topics selected by the group. Three members of the group secured paid employment recently, with their mentor noting that their self-confidence had improved considerably due to being part of the group.

We liaise with employers, universities and colleges to raise awareness of the strengths and needs of autistic people, promoting employment opportunities for autistic people across the UK. We have created a network of employers and continue to participate in events with employers, universities and researchers. We are actively involved with the Legal Neurodiversity Network and are also a member of GAIN (Group for Autism, Insurance, Investment and Neurodiversity) and Autism Action (formerly Autism Employment Network) launched by the Autism Centre for Excellence.

PRO BONO CONTRIBUTIONS

The charity has no paid employees and the expenses of the charity are kept to a minimum as the charity has no office space or fixed overheads. All of the grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation, employer roundtable events, universities and communication is carried out by the trustees on a pro bono basis, drawing on their professional experience, networks and resources. All of the charity's awareness raising events and roundtables to date have been hosted by corporate supporters at no cost to the charity or attendees. This maximises the use of the charity's funds for its beneficiaries and ensures its awareness raising events reach a wide audience.

GRANT MAKING POLICY

The charity has established its grant making policy with the aim of promoting the social inclusion of autistic people and assist them to integrate into society and achieve their potential by providing grants for funding specialist one-to-one mentoring to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment or for training activities which are relevant to improving employability.

The charity currently works with thirteen specialist mentoring organisations across the country and has carried out due diligence checks and entered into Referral Agreements with the organisations listed below which between them cover London, Surrey, Essex, Suffolk, Brighton, Birmingham, Manchester, Bedfordshire, Devon, East Midlands, Plymouth, Hull, Liverpool, Chester, Bristol, Poole, Cambridgeshire and Nottingham. All our mentors now offer remote mentoring services, which extends their geographical reach and increases the number of clients they are able to support.

Autistic Nottingham

Autism East Midlands

AS Mentoring Limited

ASC Key Mentoring (Karen Manghan)

Autism Success Formula Limited

Connect Coaching

Faraday Fearnside

Matthew's Hub

Responsa Coaching

Spectrum Career Coach

Think Musique

WayMakers Devon CIC

The charity accepts applications from grants via its mentor partners and directs enquiries from its website to the mentor partners listed on its website. All grant applications must be made via an approved mentor partner and all grant payments are made directly to the mentor partner. The charity awards initial grants for up to one year of weekly or fortnightly one-to-one mentoring support and will consider requests for grant extensions where the grant holder is making good progress towards employment and is engaging well with the mentoring support.

The applicants must be aged 18 or over and must have a diagnosis of an autism spectrum condition or evidence that they are actively seeking such a diagnosis. They must also provide evidence that they live and are entitled to work in the United Kingdom and priority is given to applicants in financial need and those who have not previously had any employment related mentoring support. While many of our applicants are looking for their first role after leaving education, we also support many people who are late diagnosed, long term unemployed or who have struggled to find a suitable role or an employer who is willing to offer the adjustments necessary for them to succeed at work.

The charity requires regular feedback from the mentors on the progress of the beneficiaries and feedback from the beneficiaries on the mentoring they receive in order to monitor the use of the charity's funds and outcomes.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

(a) Grants for Mentoring Support

In the financial year ending 31 March 2026, the charity awarded grants for specialist mentoring support to 100 autistic people around the country with the aim of improving their social inclusion and helping them to secure paid or voluntary employment, which is our largest ever cohort. The charity also continued to fund mentoring support for 128 of the grant holders from previous financial years, thus providing support for a total of 228 autistic job seekers during the financial year ended 31 March 2026, 116 of whom were still receiving support at the end of the financial year. This was the largest ever cohort supported by the charity and we continue to see a rise in applications from all areas of the country.

The average age of our 2025-26 grant holders is 30 years old, with 56% male, 39% identifying as female and 5% non-binary. The qualifications held by the grant holders range from no formal qualifications to Masters and PhD level degrees and professional qualifications. The sectors in which the applicants have secured or are seeking employment are incredibly varied, including education, health and care sector, research, game design, pharmacy, IT, hospitality, horticulture, film, music, accountancy and retail. The wide variety of careers pursued by our grant holders dispels common preconceptions of the types of roles that are suitable for autistic people and demonstrates that autistic people can pursue any career choice which matches their interest and skills with the right guidance and support. Some are also given support to pursue self-employment, including publishing novels or freelance photography, which can be an attractive option for autistic people given the challenges some workplaces can present.

In addition to supporting our beneficiaries into employment, the mentors help with anxiety, communication, sensory and also practical issues they may be facing, which improves their autonomy, well-being and social inclusion. For example, our mentors have helped beneficiaries with anxiety, travelling on public transport, relationship issues and organisational skills. On a practical level, our mentors have helped beneficiaries deal with benefits claims, tenancy problems, debt problems and referrals to appropriate health and mental health services. The mentors have also facilitated participation in new clubs, groups and social activities as well as workshops and training to improve their employability, social inclusion and well-being.

(b) Outcomes from Mentoring Support

The Government stated in the Buckland Review of Autism Employment that fewer than 3 in 10 autistic people are in work, so the results achieved by our beneficiaries are particularly impressive, demonstrating the effectiveness of the specialist mentoring support that we fund.

The outcomes for grant holders awarded grants during the financial year 2025-26 who have had between 3 and 12 months' support were as follows:

84% made job applications

60% attended job interviews

36% joined new clubs or groups

40% undertook some form of training or placement

43% secured voluntary roles

40% secured paid employment

2% went back into full time education

We anticipate that our beneficiaries will continue to move into employment, improving the employment outcomes for our 2025-26 grant holders, as has happened with all previous cohorts.

The total employment figure for our 2025-26 grant holders is 70% (40% paid; 30% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2024-25 grant holders is 80% (63% paid; 17% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2023-24 grant holders is 86% (70% paid; 16% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2022-23 grant holders is 75% (56% paid; 19 % voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2021-22 grant holders is 75% (58% paid; 17% voluntary)

The total employment figure for our 2020-21 grant holders is 81% (67% paid; 14% voluntary).

The total employment figure for our 2019-20 grant holders is: 90% (65% paid; 25% voluntary).

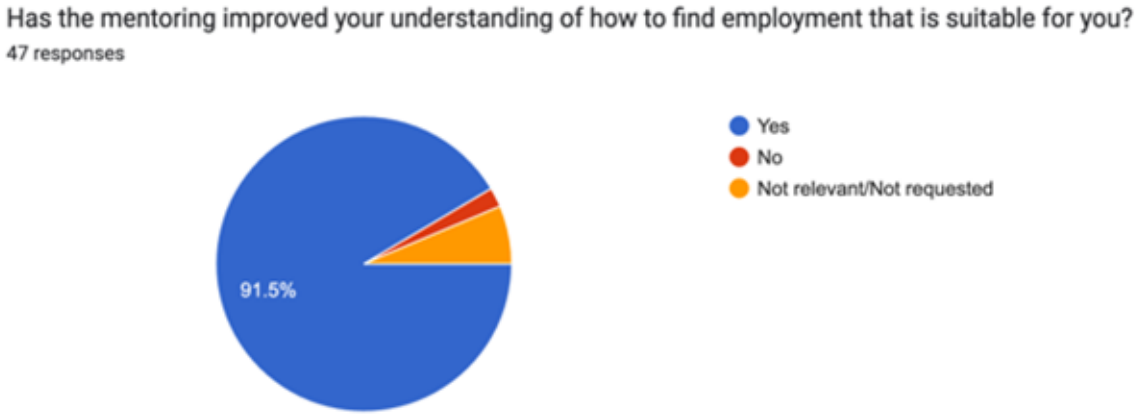
The total employment figure for our 2018-19 grant holders is: 90% (58% paid; 32%voluntary).

The above figures for all financial years include clients whose support was ended early due to health or other issues and clients whose grants have been temporarily paused. The figures for the current financial year include only grant holders who have had between 3 and 12 months' support. Some of the grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years have had more than 12 months' support.

(c) Feedback from our Beneficiaries

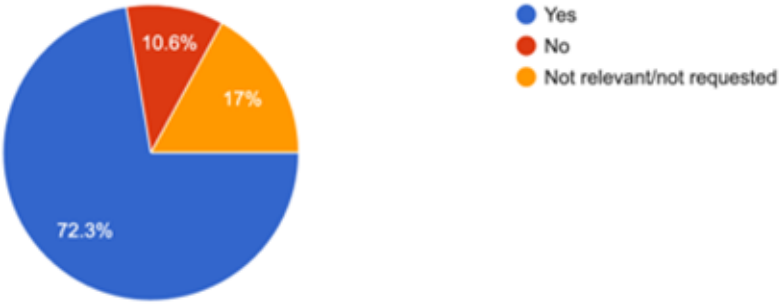
We introduced a new format for the regular feedback from our grant holders this year to simplify the questions. The results of the feedback from grant holders who have had at least 6 months' mentoring support during the financial year ended 31 March 2026 are set out in the charts below. This includes grant holders who were awarded grants in previous financial years and who continued to receive support this year. The responses demonstrate the wider impact and value of the specialist mentoring support we fund, beyond employment outcomes.





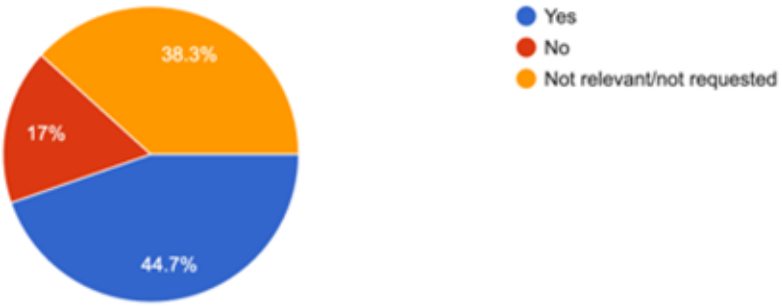
Has the mentoring given you a better understanding of the "reasonable adjustments" you can request from an employer to help you in the workplace?

47 responses



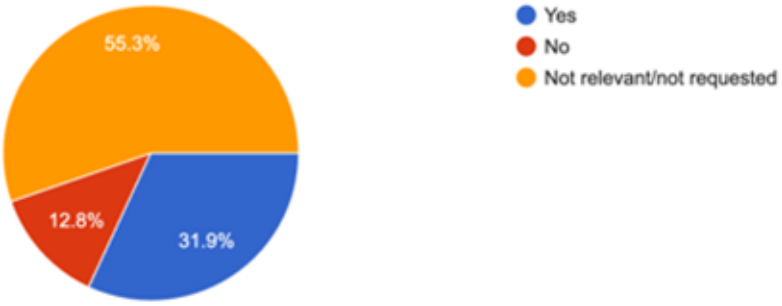
Has the mentoring improved your social contact, eg helped you join groups, make friends or participate in activities?

47 responses



Has the mentoring helped you access benefits, health care or other public services?

47 responses





The qualitative feedback responses below from some of the autistic job seekers we have supported this year provide further evidence of the value of the specialist support we fund, including the workshop programmes and our employer roundtables. This support enables people not only to find paid or voluntary employment, but also to improve their independence, social inclusion, confidence and self-esteem, to understand better how their autism affects them and to develop strategies to address issues which may be holding them back. This is beneficial not only to the individuals and their families, but also benefits the public purse as it reduces the need for reliance on benefits and public services such as mental health provision and leads to a more inclusive and cohesive society and diverse workforce.

The feedback also highlights the gap in support for autistic people when they leave education, or obtain a late diagnosis, that is so often needed to enable them to fulfil their potential in the workplace and beyond.

Autism East Midlands Client (Mentor: Samantha Roberts)

My mentor gave solid advice on courses and training opportunities that helped me into work as well as what reasonable adjustments to ask for for interviews that enabled me to secure the position that I now have.

Autism East Midlands Client (Mentor: Samantha Roberts)

Without this service I'd still be on step one trying to get anywhere but with the help so far I've had a few interviews while the other teams I've tried gave up with trying after a few weeks this one has not and keeps being useful.

Autism East Midlands Client (Mentor: Klare Bailey)

Klare is always helping and gets me to think about my behaviour and other people's behaviour and how to understand working together and customers better. She is encouraging, kind, and helps me to see what skills I have for different types of work so I can look for work in different places.

ASC Key Mentoring Client (Mentor: Karen-Anne Manghan)

Itt is hard to say, I went from feeling lost and like I had no future or purpose to having a job and a friend group, mentoring has been nothing short of incredible and though it is over for me, I'm glad my mentor can now help others who were struggling like I was.

ASC Key Mentoring Client (Mentor: Karen-Anne Manghan)

My mentor has helped me build confidence in job applications, understanding my transferable skills, and interviewing. They supported me in securing a full-time year-long internship and I feel much more optimistic about my future.

ASC Key Mentoring Client (Mentor: Karen-Anne Manghan)

I could not recommend it enough. I was in a very fragile state before I received mentoring. I knew I desperately wanted a career/career path to look ahead to but I had no understanding of how to get there and how I should approach it given my circumstances at the time. Karen has helped me re-find that confidence, belief and understanding. She is very attentive to my situation and has given me great advice and necessary steps to take. She has understood all the variables surrounding it and even though I am not quite where I want to be yet - the difference in myself from before I started till now is night and day. I have evolved so much in such a short period of time, I have got to stages in applications I never would have imagined I'd get that far into before. She understands that the right thing will come at the right time and it will take patience and resilience but the most important thing is being in the right frame of mind and she has enabled me to channel that.

AS Mentoring Client (Mentor: Mark Blake)

The support received has been invaluable in combatting isolation and thoughts of hopelessness. I am encouraged to improve creative skills which could hopefully lead to self employment. The enthusiasm and optimism provided in these sessions helps to balance my more negative thoughts.

AS Mentoring Client (Mentor: Rahana Miah)

I am happy with the support I have received thus far. I've had a lot of help with things such as improving my CV, interview preparation and situational judgement tests. My mentor is supportive and provides great advice in a friendly manner.

AS Mentoring Client (Mentor: Rahana Miah)

Rahana and the mentoring she has provided has been an absolute godsend. I had no idea where to even start, and very little self confidence, and she is now a vital part of my support network.

Connect Coaching Client (Mentor: Alex McGuiness)

This support has been instrumental in promoting my wellbeing - not only in terms of esteem and confidence, but concrete pathways and goal-oriented planning that have supported me to create a realistic, achievable future where I can aspire to thrive, not just survive.

Connect Coaching Client (Mentor: Alex McGuiness)

Alex has been exceptionally helpful and understanding while I have been in a difficult place in my life. He sees the problem holistically and is therefore able to help find solutions that work.

Connect Coaching Client (Mentor: Alex McGuiness)

Alex has been a life-saver. I don't know where I would be without him. He's always so quick to respond to emails, makes me feel truly heard and has supported me through the process of getting into work. Knowing I have someone else to sense check ideas or look over an email helps reduce stress and he has gone out of his way to create an AI tool for me, which I now use for all my professional emails.

Matthew's Hub Client (Mentor: Nicky Cooper)

I have a better understanding of what I can do for myself, such as seeking out benefits and understanding the process behind them, as well as what adjustments workplaces can make for my needs.

Responsa Coaching Client (Mentor: Marie Robinson)

Mentoring helps build my confidence, enabling me to talk through and identify suitable employment roles and articulate my strengths. It also helps me to identify my relevant experience to include in my application and covering letter.

Spectrum Career Coach Client (Mentor: Sonya Power)

I have found the mentoring useful because I wouldn't have even thought about doing my own business without the support I've received. I like that it has pushed me into doing it and to stop being scared of it. I found it helpful to have someone that could help break down actions into manageable chunks. It also helped that the actions were followed up in each meeting so I felt more motivated to complete them. I would definitely recommend mentoring to others!

Spectrum Career Coach Client (Mentor: Sonya Power)

Sonya has been extremely helpful in supporting me and is very patient and understanding. My recent health challenges have caused additional difficulties, but Sonya is continuing to check in with me and go at my pace.

Spectrum Career Coach Client (Mentor: Sonya Power)

It is important to have this service available because it is more empathetic towards job seekers and needs more focused support than would apply to other job seekers.

Autistic Nottingham Client (Mentor: Phil Bilzon)

Phil has provided support on every stage of the process. From job searching, writing up CV's and cover letters, to jumping through some of the hoops of modern interviews. Having someone on the spectrum who's 'made it' also gave me a positive role model to look up to. It can be scary and disheartening when job hunting's not going as you'd like, and just talking through the problems with someone with experience is really helpful.

Think Musique Client (Mentor: Sarah Musique)

This has been very good and very positive, first class. I feel as though I can communicate with the mentors very easily. It would be nice if everybody treated me this way, but unfortunately, they don't. I feel as though I could speak about anything with the mentoring, which is great, as very often with me, and people I don't know that well, it can lead to significant anxiety, and this hasn't. Sometimes I feel that it is my fault that they don't understand if they haven't had experience with Neurodivergency. Being able to communicate so easily and freely really helps with everything, and I actually look forward to our meetings after decades of not knowing and wondering why I was different.

(d) Employer Network

Autism Forward has created a network of employers, autistic employees and professionals to discuss and implement initiatives to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people. By sharing best practice, we can drive change forward more effectively and ensure that the changes autistic people require to access employment and thrive in the workplace are implemented.

Our network includes a wide range of employers including law firms, accountancy firms, management consultants, banks, investment banks, technology companies, telecoms companies, insurers, asset management firms, universities and other autism charities.

The series of roundtables we previously held have now largely been replaced by peer networks within law (Legal Neurodiversity Network and Neurodiversity in Law) and insurance, investment and banking (GAIN) as well as Neurodiveristy in Business, who now hold their own regular events which are driving change forward at an impressive rate across many employment fields.

We continue to see impressive initiatives resulting from our roundtables and introduction of our corporate contacts to our mentor partners such as AS Mentoring. This year, Publicis Groupe have launched more internships for neurodivergent candidates and AS Mentoring has also been working with Bath Spa University to provide a career programme for their neurodivergent students as a result of an introduction by Autism Forward.

(e) Peer support groups for Autistic Adults

We have continued to fund a series of online support groups, which are an excellent way to provide cost effective and peer to peer support for autistic adults. Our mentor partner, AS Mentoring, runs a number of programmes which we have committed to fund in line with agreed costing proposals. The current programmes that the charity supports are as follows:

(i) AS Mentoring Peer Support Groups

AS Mentoring runs regular peer support groups for autistic job seekers and for neurodivergent people who are or wish to be self-employed. They also run a peer support group for autistic women as well as regular Lunch & Learn workshops on a variety of topics including reasonable adjustments, managing anxiety, burnout and understanding your diagnosis.

(ii) Culture Club

Autism Forward funds a peer support group, known as the Culture Club (previously the Movie Club), for the autistic job seekers supported by our mentor partner in Brighton, Karen-Anne Manghan, to enable them to meet up socially. The club is proving a great success and several group members have been successful in securing employment over the last year, partly due to the increase in self-confidence from being part of this supportive group.

(f) Fundraising

We are extremely grateful to our supporters and regular donors who have enabled us to continue to provide vital support to autistic job seekers throughout this challenging time and ensure that we have certainty of funds for the coming financial year so that we can continue to increase the number of autistic job seekers we are able to support across the country.

(g) AvatarJo Interview Practice

Autism Forward has been working for a number of years with the AvatarJo role playing service which enables our autistic job seekers to undertake interview practice with the team at AvatarJo who are trained to work with neurodivergent candidates. We fund practice sessions for Autism Forward clients seeking to improve their performance at interview, which can be particularly challenging and stressful for an autistic candidate. Many employers fail to understand how difficult it can be for autistic candidates to respond to certain types of question and anxiety can become overwhelming. At the end of each practice session, the candidate receives immediate feedback on their interview performance and a recording of the interview to review with their Autism Forward mentor. We are delighted that one of our Spectrum Career Coach clients has recently secured a paid role in their chosen field after using the service. Our mentor and their client comment as follows on on the service:

Mentor: "I referred to AvatarJo to give my client additional support with practicing interview skills. Whilst I had practiced interviews with the client, they know me well and it does not mimic a real life interview situation. I also wanted to gain a fresh perspective for my client on what they are doing well and what they can approve upon. The client was happy to share their interviews with me, so that we could reflect on their feedback together. Following the AvatarJo interviews, my client had a real interview 2 weeks later and performed amazingly. I have no doubt that utlising the additional practice, reflecting on the feedback and taking that forward to the interview, supported them being offered the job."

Client: "I found my experience with AvatarJo to be very helpful and informative. The actor I worked with, Chrissie, was really friendly. Her friendly personality helped to put any anxiety I had about the mock interviews to rest. I was able to confidently answer the questions that she asked me. The three things I found helpful from my AvatarJo sessions was that firstly, you get feedback from the actor right after the interview. This helped me to understand what I did well and areas for improvement. Secondly, the sessions are recorded. This means that you can re-watch the interviews and do your own evaluation of them. Finally, some of the questions that Chrissie asked me were difficult and forced me to think of an answer on the spot. I found this to be quite helpful since it would help in an actual interview that I had two weeks after my second AvatarJo session. I highly recommend using AvatarJo. It helped me immensely with improving my interviewing skills, which helped me to successfully get into a job."

FINANCIAL REVIEW

At the end of the financial year ending 31 March 2026, the charity had reserves of £127,152 available. The charity awarded 100 new grants for mentoring support and provided funding for various workshop programmes and peer support groups run by our mentors for the benefit of autistic job seekers and self-employed people. We also continued to support 128 grant holders from previous financial years, making this our largest ever cohort of autistic job seekers.

During the financial year ending 31 March 2026, the charity received donations totalling £77,044 and £15,225 in gift aid receipts. None of the donations received by the charity had any conditions attached.

The charity’s grant making function is entirely reliant on funds that are raised through donations and sponsored events, employer match funding of donations and trust or foundations grants. The trustees are extremely grateful to all the individual donors, fundraisers and corporate supporters who have enabled the charity to provide so many autistic people with the support they need to access employment and fulfil their potential.

The charity only makes grants available if it has sufficient funds available to be able to fund the entire grant which ensures its financial stability. When the charity awards a grant, it designates funds in relation to the full amount of the grant awarded at the time the grant is approved, even though the grant will generally be paid out at regular intervals over the course of the grant period rather than in one upfront payment. If the grant is curtailed for any reason, for example if the beneficiary finds paid employment or no longer wishes to continue with the mentoring, any funds designated for that grant but not used will be reallocated to the charity’s general funds and be available to fund other grants.

The charity keeps designated funds to cover the full amount of any grant awarded which ensures that its obligations to grant holders can always be met in full. All of the charity’s grant administration, record keeping, data analysis, fundraising, event organisation and awareness raising with employers and universities is carried out by the charity trustees on a pro bono basis.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The charity is currently funding specialist one-to-one support for around 136 autistic job seekers to help them prepare for, find and maintain paid or voluntary employment and to improve their social inclusion, support which they would not otherwise have been able to access. This financial year we have supported 228 autistic job seekers, which is our largest ever cohort. We are continuing to see successful outcomes for our job seekers across a wide range of sectors and continue to be actively sought out by employers to signpost services to support and attract neurodivergent talent.

However, after over eight years of successful operation, the Board of Trustees of Autism Forward has made the incredibly difficult decision to wind down the charity over the next two years. After exploring all possible alternatives, we have concluded that due to organisational challenges and succession issues, we can no longer continue to operate indefinitely. We recognise that this will be very disappointing news for our supporters, beneficiaries and mentor partners, but we have put in place a plan for the orderly winding down over a two year period to minimise the impact on our mentors and beneficiaries. As such, we will not undertake any further fundraising, but our current funds will continue to be used to fund new grants to enable our mentor partners to establish new income streams over the coming months. Our intention is to delay the formal resolution to wind up the charity until March 2028 to enable all current grants to be used in full so that our beneficiaries will not be adversely affected. The Charity Commission has confirmed that we can continue to operate on this basis until such time as we pass a formal winding up resolution.

The charity has transformed the lives of hundreds of autistic people over the last eight years, with over 80% of our clients securing paid or voluntary employment across a wide range of careers. This year’s cohort are doing remarkable well - of those who have had between 3 and 12 months support, 70% have already secured paid of voluntary work (40% paid); 80% of clients from the 2024-25 cohort are now in voluntary or paid work or full time education (63% paid, 17% voluntary) and a remarkable 89% of the 2023-24 cohort are in paid or voluntary employment is now 89% (72% paid, 17% voluntary).

This has been made possible by the tireless work of our talented mentors, the generous support of our donors and the dedication of the trustees who have run the charity since inception without any paid employees. All our mentor partners are entirely independent of the charity so will continue to operate once the charity has closed, providing Access to Work and Disabled Student Allowance funded support, pre-employment support and employer and university funded training and mentoring for autistic people. We hope that the experience and contacts our mentor partners have gained through their partnership with Autism Forward will enable them to continue to thrive and enable many more autistic people to work and progress in their careers.

Attitudes to neurodiversity have changed immeasurably since we set up Autism Forward. It has been gratifying to see the law firms and banks we worked so hard to bring together now running their own peer led networks - including the Legal Neurodiversity Network, GAIN (Group for Insurance, Investment, and Neurodiversity) and Neurodiversity in the City. With our trustee Helen Needham playing a key role on the Neurodiversity in the City steering committee, we are confident that our work to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for autistic people will continue through these excellent networks.

AUTISM FORWARD

TRUSTEES' REPORT

The annual report was approved by the trustees of the charity on ..... and signed on its behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
08/09/2026 at 4:31:02 PM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
08/09/2026 at 10:11:49 AM UTC

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Elif Gokcen
09/09/2026 at 7:36:56 PM UTC

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
10/09/2026 at 9:01:30 PM UTC

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The trustees are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the financial statements in accordance with the United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) and applicable law and regulations.

The law applicable to charities requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the applicable Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations, and the provisions of the constitution. The trustees are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Approved by the trustees of the charity on ..... and signed on its behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
08/09/2026 at 4:31:02 PM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
08/09/2026 at 10:11:49 AM UTC

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Elif Gokcen
09/09/2026 at 7:36:56 PM UTC

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
10/09/2026 at 9:01:30 PM UTC

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

AUTISM FORWARD

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I report to the trustees on my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward ('the charity') for the year ended 31 March 2026 which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet and related notes, which are set out on pages 20 to 27.

This report is made solely to the charity's trustees, as a body, in accordance with section 145 of the Charities Act 2011. My work has been undertaken so that I might state to the charity's trustees those matters I am required to state to them in this report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, I do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charity and the charity's trustees as a body, for my work, for this report, or for the opinions I have formed

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

As the trustees of Autism Forward you are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the Act').

I report in respect of my examination of the financial statements of Autism Forward carried out under section 145 of the Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

An independent examination does not involve gathering all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently does not cover all the matters that an auditor considers in giving their opinion on the financial statements. The planning and conduct of an audit goes beyond the limited assurance that an independent examination can provide. Consequently I express no opinion as to whether the financial statements present a 'true and fair' view and my report is limited to those specific matters set out in the independent examiner's statement.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of Autism Forward as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the financial statements do not accord with those records; or
3. the financial statements do not comply with the accounting requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the financial statements give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF AUTISM FORWARD

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

SIGNED SECURELY
Chloe Greenbank
11/09/2026 at 8:07:34 AM UTC

.....
Mrs C D Greenbank
FCCA

Rotherham Taylor Limited
21 Navigation Business Village
Navigation Way
Ashton-on-Ribble
Preston
PR2 2YP

Date:.....

AUTISM FORWARD

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2026

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2026 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies	2	92,269	92,269
Investment income	3	5,447	5,447
Total income		97,716	97,716
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(927)	(927)
Charitable activities		(129,639)	(129,639)
Support costs	6	(1,783)	(1,783)
Total expenditure		(132,349)	(132,349)
Net expenditure		(34,633)	(34,633)
Net movement in funds		(34,633)	(34,633)
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		161,785	161,785
Total funds carried forward	14	127,152	127,152

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Total 2025 £
Income and Endowments from:			
Donations and legacies		183,951	183,951
Investment income	3	5,045	5,045
Total income		188,996	188,996
Expenditure on:			
Raising funds		(3,527)	(3,527)
Charitable activities		(154,028)	(154,028)
Support costs	6	(1,966)	(1,966)
Total expenditure		(159,521)	(159,521)
Net income		29,475	29,475
Net movement in funds		29,475	29,475
Reconciliation of funds			
Total funds brought forward		132,310	132,310
Total funds carried forward	14	161,785	161,785

The notes on pages 22 to 27 form an integral part of these financial statements.

AUTISM FORWARD

(REGISTRATION NUMBER: 1171704)
BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2026

	Note	2026 £	2025 £
Current assets			
Debtors	11	11,925	10,975
Cash at bank and in hand	12	232,534	278,152
		244,459	289,127
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	13	(117,307)	(127,342)
Net assets		127,152	161,785
Funds of the charity:			
Unrestricted income funds			
Unrestricted funds		127,152	161,785
Total funds	14	127,152	161,785

The financial statements on pages 20 to 27 were approved by the trustees, and authorised for issue on ..... and signed on their behalf by:

SIGNED SECURELY
Ann Leverett
08/09/2026 at 4:31:02 PM UTC

.....
Ms A Leverett
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Jane Pierce
08/09/2026 at 10:11:49 AM UTC

.....
Ms J Pierce
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Elif Gokcen
09/09/2026 at 7:36:56 PM UTC

.....
Dr E Gokcen
Trustee

SIGNED SECURELY
Helen Needham
10/09/2026 at 9:01:30 PM UTC

.....
Ms H Needham
Trustee

1 ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Statement of compliance
The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2015) - (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) and the Charities Act 2011.

Basis of preparation
Autism Forward meets the definition of a public benefit entity under FRS 102. Assets and liabilities are initially recognised at historical cost or transaction value unless otherwise stated in the relevant accounting policy notes.

After the balance sheet date, on the 11st May 2026, the trustees undertook a strategic review of the charity's activities and future funding and resolved to wind up the charity and to complete an orderly cessation of its activities and settlement of its obligations within approximately 18 months from that date. As a result of this decision, the trustees do not consider it appropriate to prepare the financial statements on a going concern basis.

Accordingly, the financial statements have been prepared on an orderly realisation basis rather than on a going concern basis. Under this basis, assets and liabilities are measured on the assumption that they will be realised and settled in the normal course of the planned wind-up. Given the nature of the charity's assets (principally debtors) and liabilities (creditors and accruals), adoption of this basis has not had a material effect on the amounts recognised in these financial statements.

Voluntary income, donations and legacies
Voluntary income, including donations and gifts, is recognised when the charity has entitlement to the income, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability. Donations and legacies are recognised on a receivable basis when receipt is probable and the amount can be reliably measured.

Gift aid

Gift Aid receivable is included in income when there is a valid declaration from the donor. Any Gift Aid amount recovered on a donation is considered to be part of that gift and is treated as an addition to the same fund as the initial donation unless the donor or the terms of the appeal have specified otherwise.

Investment income

Income from interest, royalties and dividends are included in the accounts when receipt is probable and the amount received can be measured reliably.

Expenditure and liablities

Grant expenditure

Grants are recognised in the financial statements as liabilities after they have been approved by the trustees, the recipients have been notified and there are no further terms and conditions to be fulfilled within the control of the charity. In these circumstances there is a valid expectation by the recipients that they will receive the grant.

Liability recognition

Liabilities are recognised where it is more likely than not that there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to pay out resources and the amount of the obligation can be measured with reasonable certainty.

Support costs

Support costs are those functions that assist the work of the charity but do not directly undertake charitable activities. They include the central office functions such as finance, IT, human resources and governance costs. Support costs have been allocated between governance costs and other support on a basis consistent with the use of resources. Governance costs comprise all costs involving the public accountability of the charity and its compliance with regulation and good practice.

Creditors

Creditors are recognised where the charity has a present obligation arising from a past event that will probably result in the transfer of funds to a third party and the amount due to settle the obligation can be measured or estimated reliably. They are measured at settlement amounts less any trade discounts.

Provisions for liablities

A liability is measured on recognition at its historical cost and then subsequently measured at the best estimate of the amount required to settle the obligation at the reporting date.

Financial instruments

The charity only has basic financial instruments, being trade and other debtors, cash at bank and in hand, and trade and other creditors. These are initially recognised at transaction value and subsequently measured at amortised cost, less any impairment where appropriate.

Fund structure

Unrestricted income funds are general funds that are available for use at the trustees's discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the charity.

Debtors

Debtors are measured on initial recognition at settlement amount after any trade discounts or amount advanced by the charity. Subsequently, they are measured at the cash or other consideration expected to be received.

Gift Aid receivable is recorded as accrued income at the reporting date.

Judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty
In preparing these financial statements, the trustees have made no judgements, estimates or assumptions that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next financial year.

2 INCOME FROM DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Donations and legacies;		
Appeals and donations	77,044	77,044
Gift Aid reclaimed	15,225	15,225
Total for 2026	92,269	92,269
Total for 2025	183,951	183,951

3 INVESTMENT INCOME

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Interest receivable and similar income;		
Interest receivable on bank deposits	5,447	5,447
Total for 2026	5,447	5,447
Total for 2025	5,045	5,045

4 EXPENDITURE ON RAISING FUNDS

A) COSTS OF GENERATING DONATIONS AND LEGACIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Fundraising costs	927	927
Total for 2026	927	927
Total for 2025	3,527	3,527

5 EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Grant funding of activities	129,639	129,639
Total for 2026	129,639	129,639
Total for 2025	154,028	154,028

6 SUPPORT COSTS

	Note	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds £
Independent examiner fees			
Examination of the financial statements	9	1,326	1,326
Marketing and publicity		192	192
Administrative expenses		265	265
Total for 2026		1,783	1,783
Total for 2025		1,966	1,966

7 TRUSTEES REMUNERATION AND EXPENSES

No trustee received any remuneration or other benefits from the charity in the current or prior year. No trustee was reimbursed expenses or had expenses paid on their behalf in the current or prior year.

8 STAFF COSTS

The charity had no employees during the year (2025: nil) and incurred no staff costs. All of the charity's work is carried out by the trustees and volunteers.

9 INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REMUNERATION

	2026 £	2025 £
Examination of the financial statements	1,326	1,326

10 TAXATION

The charity is a registered charity and is therefore exempt from taxation.

11 DEBTORS

	2026	2025
	£	£
Accrued income	11,925	10,975

12 CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS

	2026	2025
	£	£
Cash at bank	232,534	278,152

13 CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR

	2026	2025
	£	£
Other creditors	114,669	126,016
Accruals	2,638	1,326
	117,307	127,342

14 FUNDS

	Balance at 1 April 2025	Incoming resources	Resources expended	Balance at 31 March 2026
	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted funds				
General	161,785	97,716	(132,349)	127,152

	Balance at 1 April 2024	Incoming resources	Resources expended	Balance at 31 March 2025
	£	£	£	£
Unrestricted funds				
General	132,310	188,996	(159,521)	161,785

15 ANALYSIS OF NET ASSETS BETWEEN FUNDS

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2026 £
Current assets	244,459	244,459
Current liabilities	(117,307)	(117,307)
Total net assets	127,152	127,152

	Unrestricted funds General £	Total funds at 31 March 2025 £
Current assets	289,127	289,127
Current liabilities	(127,342)	(127,342)
Total net assets	161,785	161,785

16 RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS

There were no related party transactions in the current or prior year that require disclosure under FRS 102 and the Charities SORP.

17 NON-ADJUSTING EVENTS AFTER THE FINANCIAL PERIOD

On 11th May 2026, the trustees resolved to wind up the charity and to complete an orderly cessation of its activities and settlement of its obligations within approximately 18 months from that date. This decision was taken after the balance sheet date and has resulted in the financial statements being prepared on an orderly realisation basis rather than on a going concern basis.