



Position Specification

Zoological Society of London

Chief Financial Officer

Our Client

Founded in 1826, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) is an international conservation charity, driven by science, working to restore wildlife in the UK and around the world by protecting critical species, restoring ecosystems, helping people and wildlife live together, and inspiring support for nature. ZSL has been building stronger connections to wildlife for nearly 200 years, serving as passionate advocates for nature through its leading zoos (London and Whipsnade), innovative conservation work around the world, and through the Institute of Zoology, a world-leading research organisation.

ZSL seeks to inspire change by bringing people closer to nature and working with government to put nature at the heart of decision making. The organisation works closely with local, national and international partners to deliver conservation on the ground, protecting endangered species, restoring ecosystems, and helping communities live with wildlife. The society also works to inform and educate and to influence policy at a global level. London Zoo and Whipsnade Zoo play a critical role in global conservation, providing a home to many endangered species, running breeding programmes and building connections between people and wildlife.

ZSL is funded through research grants, philanthropic donations, and income from commercial activity, including membership and visitor spending at the two zoos. Total income for 2021/22 was £79.5m (2020/21: £58.8m), of which £30.9m was visitor income. As ZSL approaches its bicentenary in 2026, the society's leadership, led by CEO Matthew Gould, is focused on securing and developing strong and sustainable income streams to support the organisation's critical conservation work. This will include an extensive, multi-million pound capital projects programme, for the development of a multi-disciplinary nature campus, and a national centre for native species.

[ZSL website](#)

[ZSL Annual Report 2021-22](#)

The Role

The CFO will be the key partner for the CEO in building ZSL, increasing its impact and making it viable for the long-term. This will require growing and diversifying income, investing for the future while living within its means, and stewarding ZSL's resources with skill and care.

As ZSL approaches its bicentenary in 2026, the society's leadership, led by CEO Matthew Gould, needs to develop sustainable income streams to support the organisation's critical conservation work. This will include an extensive, multi-million pound capital projects programme, and a Centre for UK Native Species. The new CFO will be key to this plan.

The CFO will drive commercial and financial performance through the conservation zoos, membership & fundraising, as well as overseeing the financial growth and performance of ZSL science and conservation functions, all in accordance with ZSL's charitable objectives.

In addition to executive leadership of financial resources at ZSL, the CFO is responsible for the Finance & Procurement team, the Legal, Governance & Risk management team, and the ICT team, with four direct line reports and 50 indirect line reports.

The CFO will also serve as a key partner to the Council of Trustees, ZSL's governing board, particularly through their engagement with the Audit, Finance and Risk Committee.

Key responsibilities

Financial sustainability and investments

- Lead a commercially focussed financial strategy which includes plans for growth, capital structures, investment and commercial finance and is capable of funding ambitious plans for growth through a programme of financial redesign and transformation, supporting the growth of commercial income and diversification of funding.
- Develop, maintain and engage existing and new external stakeholders with credibility to ensure that ZSL is represented in the full trust and confidence of investors, commercial partners, and contractors.
- Accountable to ensure ZSL is sufficiently well financed to ensure that it is sustainable over the longer term.
- Leadership responsibility for the finance function of a registered charity with around £86m of net financial assets generating an income of around £80m each year.
- Be accountable for the Annual Reports & Accounts, and regular strategic financial reporting, insight and analysis to the most senior internal audiences through regular delivery of reports to the Board of Trustees, the CEO and ExCo colleagues, enabling them to deliver their responsibilities and understand strong forward indicators to focus activity in support of the strategic direction.
- Ensure the financial operations of ZSL comply with the requirements of the financial regulatory and tax authorities in the UK and where ZSL has overseas offices, taking account of operational best practice.

Organisational operations and professional services

- Providing vision, strategic direction and leadership in the planning, management and development of all global business services functions (Finance and Procurement, ICT, and Legal, Governance and Risk Management)
- Ensure the organisation's operational and professional infrastructure is equipped to develop with and adapt to ZSL's ambitions for growth and transformation in the UK and overseas
- Strategically safeguard the organisation and provide high-level assurance to senior audiences through the ownership of a risk framework that reflects the organisation's risk appetite, charitable status, and strategy ambitions for ZSL's science and conservation impact.
- Work with ExCo to deliver a culture of strong adherence to compliance and risk management. Identify and manage the risks that are evident in relation to financial activities.
- Provide the Audit, Finance and Risk Committee with oversight of any identified control issues, ensuring these are addressed transparently.
- Ensure effective, robust and compliant Information Technology systems, infrastructure, support, policies and resources are in place, meeting the technology needs of the Society and its internal customers, in the UK and overseas.

Leadership and management

- As a member of Executive Committee, provide strong, effective, and visible leadership across the organisation directorate to managers, staff and volunteers at ZSL.

Values and behaviours for people management

- **Collaborative:** Proactively seeks opportunities for themselves and their team to work with others both internally and externally.
- **Inclusive:** Proactively and vocally role models inclusive behaviour, sponsoring ZSL's DE&I agenda.
- **Innovative:** Is forward thinking and able to see the broader picture when planning and organising work.
- **Inspiring:** Articulates and generates enthusiasm for ZSL's vision and value.

Candidate Profile

| Experience | |
|----------------------|---|
| Essential | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proven record of being an effective, “can do” CFO who has helped a CEO deliver an ambitious vision. • Significant experience of leading the finance and operations at Board/Executive Team level in an organisation at similar scale and complexity to ZSL. • Experience of developing and delivering funding options for capital investment programmes. • Broader corporate and commercial experience. • Demonstrable experience of successfully leading and delivering financial sustainability, including through restructuring & refinancing. • Demonstrable experience of integrating commercial acumen into thinking on financial strategy. • Experience of overseeing pension funds. • Educated to degree level and a qualified accountant (ACA, ACCA, CIMA or equivalent). |
| Desirable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the charity sector, Charities SORP and other regulatory requirements for the operation of charities. • Broad understanding of the visitor attraction market. • Leadership of corporate partnerships and management of third-party contractors. • Financial leadership in an international environment. • Knowledge of working with grant funding of academia and/or charities. |
| Knowledge and skills | |
| Essential | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An exceptional, inspiring, mission driven and collaborating leader with proven ability to work with peers to successfully realise the overall goals of an organisation. • Strong current knowledge of financial accounting requirements, with those applicable to the charity sector being an advantage. • A proven leader of financial sustainability and growth. • Ability to thrive and lead through ambiguity, change and complexity. • An authentic desire to work in the conservation sector and a genuine commitment to the work of ZSL. |
| Desirable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leads by example, influencing, supporting, challenging, and inspiring confidence in others. |

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Additional requirements

Essential

- This post is a blended role for office and home working; the CFO should be on-site at least two days per week.
- Strong commitment to creating a culture that lives ZSL values and commitment to safeguarding, equality and diversity.

How to apply

ZSL has retained Russell Reynolds Associates to advise on this appointment. To apply, please send your CV, and supporting statement to responses@russellreynolds.com by **Tuesday 7th November 2023**. Your supporting statement should succinctly highlight your motivation, experience, and skills against the requirements of the role. Please include the role title in the subject of your email.

If you have a question about the position, or your application, please contact the Russell Reynolds Team - Nick Ricketts, Helen Metcalfe and Saanya Sharma - at responses@russellreynolds.com

Equality statement

ZSL strongly encourages applications from all backgrounds and celebrates the value of having a team of employees with diverse skills, experiences, and heritage. ZSL is committed to ensuring its teams can bring their authentic selves to work without fear of discrimination. ZSL has active equality networks for staff with lived experience and those who provide active allyship in Race and Culture, Team Pride, Disability Network, and Menopause Network, complemented by the strategic EDI Steering Group.