

Media Release
Thursday 18 June 2026

Chris Smith, former Secretary of State for Culture, to be next chair of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

- Lord Smith has joined the board of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and will become chair in Autumn 2026.
- He was Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport from 1997 to 2001.
- Lord Smith highlights the OAE's innovative work including performing on historical instruments and its residency in a state secondary school at Acland Burghley School in Camden.
- The selection panel for the role included musicians from the OAE and board members.



The Right Honourable Chris Smith, Baron Smith of Finsbury, will be the new chair of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (OAE). Lord Smith will succeed Imogen Charlton-Edwards who steps down in the autumn after seven years in the role.

On accepting the position Lord Smith said:

“I’m really excited to be taking up the role of chair of the OAE. Partly because they are an exceptionally good orchestra full of really top-notch players. Secondly, because they are player-led and the players take an active role in running the board and running the orchestra. And thirdly, they are doing all sorts of innovative work. The partnership with Acland Burghley School, Breaking Bach, the use of period instruments; this is an orchestra at the top of its game and I’m honoured to be becoming part of it.”

Lord Smith was a Member of Parliament from 1983 to 2005 and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport from 1997 to 2001. In that role he is closely associated with the flagship initiatives of free museum admission and the Clore Leadership Programme, whilst his other cultural associations include the London Cultural Consortium, Donmar Warehouse, The Wordsworth Trust, the Grand Union Orchestra and BAFTA. His wider work and interests range from the Environment Agency and Ramblers' Association to campaigns for LGBTQI+ equality. He is currently the Chancellor of the University of Cambridge.

Crispin Woodhead, Chief Executive of the OAE, commented on Lord Smith's appointment:

"It is going to be a real rocket boost for us to have Lord Smith leading our board. That we have recruited one of the most game-changing of Culture Secretaries to the role is a vote of confidence in our mission to transform the way that cultural organisations interact with society. Under Lord Smith's guidance we will be able to elevate our fundamental pledge that every penny spent on the arts is a penny spent on education; from our partnership with Acland Burghley School in Camden, to performances on stage and our long-term residencies in communities around the UK."

Cecelia Bruggemeyer, a double bass player in the Orchestra and currently chair of the Players Artistic Committee, added:

"It's exciting to have the Chair, which has always been in good hands, pass on to Chris with his fantastic track record of campaigning for the arts, and access to them. To have someone with such revered experience, who loves the music we play, who wants to hear from and meet with players, who wants to support our artistic endeavour, is so important for a player-led orchestra like OAE. We feel very fortunate and look forward to this new stage under his leadership."

The selection panel was led by Daniel Alexander KC (Board member/Chair of the Nominations Committee) with Cecelia Bruggemeyer (double bassist, Chair of the Players Artistic Committee and Vice Chair of the Board), Margaret Faultless (violinist and one of the OAE's leaders), Adrian Frost (board member of both the OAE and the OAE Trust) and Crispin Woodhead (Chief Executive and Board member).

Imogen Charlton-Edwards, the OAE's outgoing chair, welcomed Lord Smith, saying:

"I am absolutely delighted that Lord Smith will become Chair of the OAE. His long and distinguished career has encompassed a myriad of fields, and he will bring unrivalled experience to the Orchestra. There can be no better endorsement of our artistic standards and the partnership with Acland Burgey School than to have such an eminent cultural leader take the helm. We welcome him wholeheartedly and with great confidence in this, the Orchestra's fortieth year. I know that under Lord Smith's leadership the Orchestra achieve new heights of artistic and social expression."

[Ends]

For further information contact:

Doug Buist
Marketing Director, OAE
doug.buist@oae.co.uk
020 8159 9325

The **Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment** is renowned for its curious, challenging and trailblazing approach to making music. It performs music from the 17th to the early 20th Centuries on instruments or replicas and using techniques from the time the music was composed. It is a Resident Orchestra at London's Southbank Centre, an artistic associate at Kings Place, and regularly tours the UK and internationally. It works with a network of schools and music hubs to deliver its education programme across the UK with over 24,500 participants in 2024/25. In 2020 it became the first UK orchestra to be based in a school when it became resident at Acland Burghley School in Tufnell Park, North London... our office is literally in the playground.

The OAE is a registered charity with its governance overseen by a board of trustees, led by the Chair. Its artistic programme is directed by the Players Artistic Committee (PAC); members of PAC are automatically part of the board of trustees.

The OAE is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

Website: oae.co.uk