NAJ AGM 2026 - Speeches

Adam Jacobs – Outgoing Chair Speech

A very good afternoon to you all,

Here at our AGM, it's my role to report back on what your Association has achieved over the past year. As I'm sure you're aware, I'll be stepping down from Chair today, so with your permission, I'd like to give that report, then spend a moment reflecting on the last two years, and ultimately, look to the future.

Over the past 12 months, the NAJ has continued to provide meaningful support across all 5 areas of the Association. In Representation, Professional standards, Education, Benefits slash services and most importantly, in Engagement with our members. So let's look at these in turn.

Representation: We've ensured that our members' voices are represented in multiple government consultations, from intellectual property and training routes to business challenges.

The NAJ collaborated closely with all four assay offices to present how hallmarking could be modernised, to support consumer confidence, and the industry, as well as assisting enforcement when needed.
We are leading the development and formation of The British Jewellery Council, a collective organisation that brings together associated bodies from across the jewellery, watch, silversmithing, and allied trades - to ensure a unified and elevated voice is recognised, valued and supported at the highest tables.

In **Professional Standards**, the NAJ Resolve mediation service is now Chartered Trading Standards Institute Accredited, one of only 45 accredited dispute resolution schemes within the UK. 183 resolutions through NAJ Resolve were carried out on behalf of our members. 9 Codes of Practice were either created or updated alongside the release of a guidance note on precious metal price volatility, demonstrating the NAJ's proactive approach to tackling timely challenges within the trade.

The Association's **education** offering continues to go from strength to strength, with a record intake of 35 students for our valuing training course, Foundations of Appraisal Practice. We launched NAJ Endorsed to recognise outstanding training schemes by employers and external

training organisations. 7 courses have been granted NAJ Endorsed status, with more currently going through the auditing process.

The first apprentice on the setting pathway came through our end-point assessment, opening up new opportunities for trade training, and work has begun to move all Jewellery Education Training courses to a new, digital-first learning platform to support the modern workforce and neurodivergent learners.

In benefits and services, we've materially enhanced our offering.

We have secured a preferred partnership with insurer TH March, bolstering our 120-year relationship. We have further strengthened our business support with providers of Intellectual Property services through the National Business Register, payment provision through WorldPay, and Environmental, Social and Governance support through the partner organisation, Positive Luxury. With jewellery-related crime on the rise, we continue to invest in SaferGems, a vital service and a source of peace of mind for our members. It's no surprise this is a high priority going forward.

Our **engagement** continues to flourish. Events-wise: Our recent Valuers' Conference, Retail Congress and JET Graduation all saw healthy double-digit growth and engagement, and last year's NAJ Awards were record-breaking for the Association, with almost 400 guests. We will be opening up nominations for this year's Awards next week, but make sure to keep the 8th October free in your diaries. We also launched "NAJ Near You" – an ongoing series of local meetups for members. In the last few weeks, the NAJ team have held events in Bristol, Winchester and Brighton, and there are similar gatherings planned around the country for the remainder of 2026.

And when we talk about engagement, we recognise our industry, made up of multiple communities. To this end, the NAJ established new professional community groups for suppliers, designer craftspeople, and Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, alongside reconstituting existing groups for retail, valuing, professional and technical standards, plus education and training.

Across our committees, working groups and professional communities, there is an incredible amount of time, expertise and passion being given. Many of those individuals are here in this room today. The pace of

change that we have delivered together has been remarkable – it's tiring enough to read out the list, let alone deliver the work you do in them!

To every one of you - thank you. Your contribution makes this Association stronger, more relevant, and more impactful than ever before.

So that's been our year, and I hope you agree it's been one of real, tangible delivery.

Now, as promised, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on my past 2 privileged years as Chair.

It feels very recent that I took the role, back at the Tower of London. And here we are at another historic castle, 2 years later. What are they trying to tell me? I was a relic then, and more so now? Do they still need to keep me within 500 yards of a jail cell at any time?

I’m not sure, but – and here comes the link folks – much like these two incredible castles, I feel the last two years have been about strong foundations.

Over this time, our ambition has been clear - to build foundations for the future. And I know we’ve made real progress in doing exactly that.

Today, we build on those with:

- A strong, capable and growing NAJ team, bringing new skills and energy into the Association to support members across the 5 pillars of representation, professional standards, education & training, member benefits and services, and engagement. Thank you to Ben, Marie, Katie, Paul, Adam, Matthew, Lily, Claire, Lyn, Chloe, Stacey, Sharon, Sarah and Belinda.
- A membership that continues to grow — not just in number, but in engagement and commitment, with nearly 450 members joining during my time as Chair.
- A National Committee that is collaborative, forward-looking, focused on long-term impact for members, and with new faces joining with new energy

- And a trusted network of partners, strengthening the support and opportunities we can offer
- A fantastic and deepening relationship with BATF, with thanks to Tom and his team
- Moreover, we now have a much clearer understanding of what our members need most.

All of us have continued to navigate shifts in market conditions, evolving consumer behaviours, and the ongoing pressures of running a business in today’s environment.

We've seen the influence of policy, the importance of representation.

But in parallel with that, we’ve also experienced progress, momentum, and growth. At the same time, we’ve said goodbye to friends and colleagues who have played an important role in shaping where we are today. They are very much part of this journey, and I’m certain they would be proud of the continued strength of the Association and still cheering us on, wherever they are.

I have consistently heard about challenges: from recruiting and retaining skilled people to legislative complexity, rising operational costs, and

keeping pace with evolving customer expectations. These are not small challenges, and they will not disappear overnight. But recognising them clearly is a critical step in making sure we provide the right support, in a timely fashion.

The NAJ has not been in an ivory tower (or castle); we've been listening and learning.

Looking ahead, under Mehdi's capable leadership, our role is to build on those foundations. The NAJ may not be as established as 698-year-old Warwick Castle – as a sprightly 139 year old organisation – but we at NAJ HQ certainly have aspirations to be that long-serving.

Our future direction focuses on three clear areas:

Growth: not just in attracting new members, but also creating meaningful engagement and delivering real value to those already part of the community.

Voice: ensuring the Association continues to represent, champion and amplify the views of our members, influencing the wider industry and ensuring our sector is heard where it matters most.

Support: guaranteeing that the education, resources, services and benefits we provide are not only accessible and relevant, but genuinely useful and inspiring, helping members navigate challenges and identify and seize opportunities.

Ultimately, everything we do should help our members to

- Grow and develop their businesses profitably and responsibly
- Attract, develop and retain talented people
- Deliver outstanding customer experiences and services

Because when our members succeed, the entire industry is stronger.

Now, in voluntary roles like this, the ambition is simple: to leave things in a better place than when you arrived.

I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved together over the past two years, and grateful for the support I have received from the National Committee, the NAJ team, and the wider membership.

But more than anything, I am optimistic. Optimistic about where the Association is heading, about the strength of our community, and about the opportunities ahead.

I wanted to end this short reflection on a pair of thank yous. As you probably all know, I'm a 3rd generation independent retailer, and I'm delighted to welcome my parents, Ian and Adrienne, here, the second generation of Jacobs. I wouldn't have been able to aspire to, let alone do this job without them, so thank you. And on behalf of all the Jacobs family – past and present – thank you to the NAJ for your service to the industry and for trusting me to give back to the trade that's supported our family.

So, imagine there's a glass in your hand here's to the continued growth, resilience and development of the Association and its members. Cheers!

Now moving to the formal business of today's AGM, I can confirm I have received notice from the National Committee of the appointment of Mehdi Saadian as Chair of the National Association of Jewellers for the period of 2026-2028.

Please welcome Mehdi and NAJ President Gary Williams to the stage for the official handover.

Mehdi Saadian – Incoming Chair

Thank you, Adam.

And more importantly, thank you for your leadership, your commitment, and the energy you have brought to this role over the past two years.

You spoke about the aim of leaving things in a better place than when you found them, and I think it is very clear to everyone here that you have achieved exactly that.

You have helped strengthen the foundations of the Association, brought clarity to its direction, and ensured that we are better positioned to support our members in a changing and often challenging environment.

On behalf of the National Committee and membership, I would like to offer our sincere thanks. I would also like to present you with a small gift from the NAJ team and the National Committee to commemorate your time as Chair. Could you please join me back on stage?

[hand over picture]

[applause]

Stepping into this role, I do so with a strong sense of responsibility, but also, if I'm honest, a real sense of excitement.

I've been part of this industry my whole career. I've sat on the other side of this table as a member. I know what the NAJ means to businesses like mine, and I know what it could mean for the businesses that haven't yet found their way to us.

That's what drives me. And that's what I intend to focus on.

We have a real ambition to grow this community. To welcome more retailers, designers, craftspeople and suppliers who belong here but aren't yet with us. And equally, to deepen what membership means for the businesses already in this room.

Because what unites us is more than membership of an organisation. The NAJ exists around a common interest - the health and prosperity of

the whole trade. Retailers, makers, designers, valuers, suppliers: different businesses, different disciplines, but a shared stake in where this industry goes.

Because the Association is in a strong position today with significant forward momentum.

We have:

- A growing and engaged membership
- A talented and dedicated team
- A clear sense of purpose and direction
- And a community that continues to support one another

Our task now is to keep building on that momentum.
I also want to be clear about the kind of Chair I intend to be. Open and transparent with you, with the Committee, and with the wider membership.

We have a clear strategy, and I intend to be transparent about how we're delivering it. That means reporting back to members on what we're doing and why - not just at moments like this one, but regularly and openly.

And it means actively seeking your feedback, because the direction of this Association should be shaped by the people it serves.

That means continuing to listen to our members. Understanding their challenges, recognising their ambitions, and ensuring that everything we do remains relevant, practical and valuable.

What makes all of this possible is community. Not just membership of an organisation, but a genuine network of people who share a stake in where this trade goes. And I want that community to reflect the full breadth of our industry - in background, in discipline, in perspective.
A more inclusive and diverse NAJ is not just the right thing to aim for. It makes us stronger.

But community doesn't happen by itself. It needs participation. So I want to be direct: we need more of you to get involved.

Whether that's through a professional community group, a working group, an event, or simply bringing a fellow business to the next one, your participation is what makes this Association stronger.

This is an industry with an extraordinary heritage. The craft, the precision, the standards that British jewellery is known for - these didn't happen by accident.

They were built by generations of skilled people who took their work seriously and took pride in what they made.

But heritage without renewal becomes a museum piece. One of the most important things we can do - right now - is make this trade so compelling, so full of opportunity, so visibly rewarding, that the next generation doesn't just stumble into it by chance.

They choose it. Deliberately. Proudly.

That means investing in education and clear pathways into the industry. It means creating a welcoming environment where people feel supported from the moment they arrive. And it means ensuring that a young designer, a newly qualified gemmologist, or an apprentice bench jeweller can see a future here — with opportunities, guidance, and open doors at every stage of their journey.

And the Association's future depends, above all, on the people who give their time to it, so before we move to the formal business, I'd like to recognise two individuals who have made a significant contribution to the Association.

Heather Callaway and Gary Wroe will be stepping down from the NAJ National Committee.

Both have given their time, their expertise, and their unwavering support to the Association over a number of years. While they step back from these roles, they remain an important part of the wider network, particularly through their continued involvement with the British Allied Trades Federation.

There may not be flowers on this occasion, but it is important that we acknowledge their contribution, commitment, and impact they have made. Thank you both.

Now I would like to confirm that Adam Jacobs has proposed that Anna Blackburn, Alexia Taylor and Peter Wong are re-elected as Members of the National Committee for the period 2026/28, and Kerry Saunders has seconded this proposal.

Please could all NAJ members in favour raise their hands?

Could all NAJ members against please raise their hands?

Resolution carried (or not)

I would like to confirm that Chris Oliver has proposed the election of Angela Evans, Sammantha Maclachlan and Rachel Morrish as Members of the National Committee for the period 2026/28, and I have seconded this proposal.

Please, could all NAJ members in favour raise their hands?

Could all NAJ members against please raise their hands?

Resolution carried (or not)

Finally, we have a special resolution for changes to the NAJ by-laws, which we would like to ask members to vote on the following resolution that has been proposed by Gary Williams and seconded by Rachel Morrish.

With effect from the conclusion of the meeting, the draft amendments to the By-Laws produced to the meeting and for the purpose of identification, initialled by the Chairperson, shall be adopted as the By-Laws of NAJ in substitution for and to the exclusion of NAJ's existing By-Laws;

that with effect from the conclusion of the meeting, the draft Fair Use Policy produced to the meeting and for the purpose of identification initialled by the Chairperson, be adopted as the Fair Use Policy of NAJ and will be made available on the NAJ's website.

Could all members in favour please raise their hands?

Could all those members against please raise their hands?

Resolution carried (or not)

That concludes the NAJ formal business. Please welcome Gert back.