



Much has gone on, been achieved, postponed or in some cases cancelled thanks to the last, difficult 12 months, but what hasn't changed is how we continue to strive to best support the professional jewellery community. We're proud that the NAJ membership stands tall under the circumstances and obstacles put on it through Covid and Brexit, changing consumer trends and commercial challenges from international suppliers, particularly from southeast Asia. British jewellery and UK jewellers are very much here to stay.

As the pandemic unfolded, we prioritised what was most important at the time. The existing team came together to step up and quickly learned the new skills required – our strength is in our team and we needed no additional external resource. We are proud of our whole team of staff and volunteers who united with passion and diligence to support members and to learn new skills in digital event and online training production.

### **Supporting the Sector through the Pandemic**

Our immediate response included providing clear and detailed updates and information for our members to ensure that as we had the most updated information to feed out to help support our industry. As our association supports such a wide variety of businesses and individuals, we worked hard to create comprehensive support suitable for all. These ranged from weekly drop-in coffee breaks, to detailed updates, liaising with other associations and governing bodies and the creation of an online Covid news hub.

During lockdown 1 it became clear to us that there was a requirement for learning and we created opportunities to enable this. We opened up access to our better business toolbox to benefit more people in the sector. We also created some free modules of the Association's JET 1 foundation level programme. Our webinar programme was highly successful, and we will continue with monthly NAJ Lives during 2021 right up to the Summit in September.

As NAJ Chair, I'm extremely thankful for the ongoing support for the Association. However, I'm also reassured from the comments and feedback from the sector to say that when the sector was faced with challenges, the NAJ was there to support their business through it. It was important to help our members show that consumers could place trust in our industry when retail was able to open again.

As part of a purpose-built brand 'StoreSafe', we provided guidance, training and certification and asked retailers to sign a pledge. The StoreSafe and SiteSafe guidance, online education and communication updates helped many members to be best prepared in the pandemic, and investment into consumer PR, website development, trade research and complaint mediation are also key benefit developments to help promote our members and assure their customers that buying from an NAJ member gives them peace of mind.

### **Championing Professionalism and Standards**

Education is a key pillar of the Association and great progress has been made in this area. We're delighted to continue our work on the Goldsmiths' Charter, an initiative that will recognise standards in the jewellery sector.

In addition, we are now finalising an application to be an End Point Assessment organisation. This means that we have the requisite policies and procedures in place to assure the quality of our assessment decisions, and an application to the Apprenticeship Assessment Service to prove that we have the capabilities and capacity to assess the apprenticeship standards that we have applied for.

If all goes to plan, we should have approval to endpoint assess the Level TWO Retailer, Level THREE Retail Team Leader and Level THREE Jewellery Manufacturing Apprenticeships later this year. Watch this space indeed!

The NAJ's popular JET programmes also continue to evolve. The Education Team is reviewing the current student learning platforms with a view to consolidating JET qualifications and Foundations of Appraisal Practice onto a new Virtual Learning Environment. This will also include JET Essentials which has been popular for people new into the sector. What's more the qualifications continue to move onto the Government's regulated qualifications framework, giving members further assurance of their quality and value to UK jewellery businesses.

Service is one particular asset that NAJ members have over their competitors, and I believe it is where JET plays a significant role.

### **Fit for the Future**

We ended 2020 in the strongest financial position we've been in since the National Association of Goldsmiths (NAG) and British Jewellers Association (BJA) merged in 2017. This is as a result of the processes and decisions that needed to be taken for the NAJ to have its own stamp, unique to the NAG or BJA. The team has continued to maximise income and cost controls to ensure the Association is fit for the future.

We have now brought forward our planned strategic development from September to July as a move from our 'essential strategy' to a version that will define our next two years. We feel that jewellery has a unique offering – it is forging on into a perfect storm, where a post-pandemic world looks for sustainable, local and quality sentiments and services delivered with peace of mind and assurance. It is exactly what we stand for at the NAJ.

One thing that absolutely has our attention is the issue of 'diversity and inclusivity', and how the 'one body' for the jewellery sector encourages progress and conversations, but also supports members with these real-world challenges. People will always be the biggest influence on and focus of jewellery businesses, whether staff, customers or stakeholders, so it's important that we all work together to make progress.

We're delighted to continue to support the MasterPeace Academy in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, set up to support local people enter into the sector, no matter what their background. Credit must go to NAJ President David Doyle and the wider BATF Benevolent Society for their work on this project particularly.

## Behind the scenes

I couldn't end this report without saying thank you to the team of volunteers who support myself as Chair in the committees across NAJ, the staff team who continue to push the organisation forward and you the members, who we build everything around and whose support is most critical.

I must make a special mention of thank you to Lyn, Lindsey and Sandra in the staff team, each of whom have surpassed significant milestones in this last year. Lyn has passed 10 years' service, Lindsey 25 and Sandra has just completed her 45th year with the Association. We're tremendously thankful to each of you and we look forward to recognising your ongoing commitment properly when we can do in a more traditional format.

The times we've experienced this last 15 months have certainly been different but now we look ahead.

## Let's reconnect

In September we will host the NAJ Summit. The three-day programme of events which brings jewellery retailers, valuers, manufacturers and suppliers together from far and wide enabling the membership to reconnect.

Home to talks, workshops and masterclasses from thought leaders and jewellery experts, the summit features:

- a focused one-day Retail Jewellers' Congress,
- an exclusive Supplier Showcase
- an immersive Valuers' Conference spanning the entire three days, and
- a range of seminars and talks to support the people in NAJ member businesses.

The pinnacle of the event is the members' gala dinner held on the evening of Sunday 12th September, where it will be fabulous to see members enjoy each other's company once more.

For more Summit information please visit the NAJ website.

I wish you all the very best in health and in business, and I look forward to seeing you later in the year.

Kind regards



Gary Wroe

NAJ Chair