



# THEATRE

Secretariat: Society of London Theatre & UK Theatre

## APPG for Theatre AGM

Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2022

### Parliamentarians in Attendance

Giles Watling MP (Chair)  
Simon Baynes MP  
Kevin Brennan MP  
Lord Kerslake  
Andrew Lewer MP

### Also in Attendance

Julian Bird, CEO, SOLT and UK Theatre  
Colin Campbell, Giles Watling MP's Office  
James Halden, Giles Watling MP's Office  
Christopher Walker, SOLT and UK Theatre

### Apologies

Lord Taylor of Warrick  
Janet Whitaker MP

### Meeting

#### 1. Welcome

Giles Watling MP welcomed everyone to the meeting and reflected on the past year and its impact on the theatre industry. He said he looked forward to a more positive year ahead and that the APPG should be at the forefront of promoting theatre and its benefits across Parliament and beyond.

Christopher Walker provided an update on the agreed activity for the upcoming year:

- There will be three evidence sessions on: Skills, International Trade and Touring, and Levelling Up. The first of these will be the session on Skills on 22<sup>nd</sup> February which will be followed by the publication of a short report.
- The APPG will host a Parliamentary Reception for Parliamentarians and members of the industry in May 2022. Christopher will liaise with Giles Watling MP's office to secure a date and organise the event.
- At least one more evidence session will be held following summer recess.

#### 2. Election of Officers

All existing officers were re-elected to the APPG. There were no new officers elected. Giles Watling MP was duly re-elected as Chair. A full list of officers is included in Appendix A.

#### 3. Industry Expectations of 2022

Julian Bird provided an update on behalf of the industry in relation to the impact of COVID-19:

- The impact of the Omicron variant continues to be felt across the UK, particularly by theatres in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland which were placed under stricter

restrictions than those in England. This has had a significant impact on venues and has prevented touring productions from completing their runs.

- Ticket sales had rebounded after theatres were allowed to reopen in summer 2021, and pre-Christmas sales had looked strong for many in the industry. The need for public caution as a result of Omicron, however, resulted in a collapse in sales for venues across the UK. This looks set to continue until at least the Spring as audience confidence has been knocked back once again.
- The industry welcomed the additional funding which was provided to the Cultural Recovery Fund and other cultural funds across the UK. The industry has also provided financial support of its own through various projects, including raising £2m in 48 hours for the Theatre Artists' Fund. This is currently being distributed to freelancers as grants in addition to the over £5m which was distributed previously through the Fund.
- As theatres look beyond the pandemic, there are several key issues which will need to be addressed. The skills shortages which were prevalent pre-pandemic have been further exacerbated by people leaving the industry during lockdown or reconsidering their career paths as a result. Freelancers in particular are facing extreme difficulties. The impact of Britain's exit from the EU on international touring is an ongoing concern. The sector will also continue to proactively engage with key pillars of the Government's agenda on levelling up and supporting the post-pandemic economic recovery.

#### 4. Finances

The finances for 2021 were approved unanimously.

#### 5. AOB

- All officers present expressed a strong interest in visiting several theatres both in and outside of London. Several suggestions were made including the Royal & Derngate in Northampton and the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations at Sheffield Theatres.
- Simon Baynes MP made members aware that the APPG on Performing Arts Education and Training which he chairs is holding its AGM on 1<sup>st</sup> February.
- Giles Watling MP said that he would write to all Parliamentarians to make them aware of the APPG's planned activity for the year and to promote the return of the industry more broadly.

Appendix A – Elected Officers for 2022

<b>Role</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Party</b>
Chair and Registered Contact	Giles Watling MP	Conservative
Vice Chair	Nickie Aiken MP	Conservative
Vice Chair	Simon Baynes MP	Conservative
Vice Chair	Kevin Brennan MP	Labour
Vice Chair	Theo Clarke MP	Conservative
Vice Chair	Lord Kerslake	Crossbench
Vice Chair	Andrew Lewer MP	Conservative
Vice Chair	Kerry McCarthy MP	Labour
Vice Chair	Stephen Metcalfe MP	Conservative
Vice Chair	Alison Thewliss MP	Scottish National Party
Vice Chair	Baroness Whitaker	Labour