

Katie Town appointed as Interim Chair of the Theatres Trust

News story

The Secretary of State for DCMS has appointed Katie Town as the Interim Chair of the Theatres Trust from 01 January 2022 to 31 March 2022 or until a substantive Chair is appointed, whichever is sooner. This interim appoint has been made whilst the appointment process for a substantive Chair is concluded.



Katie Town is Executive Director of Theatre Royal Wakefield, a Grade II* listed Frank Matcham theatre in West Yorkshire. She has led the theatre since the end of 2015, taking the organisation through a process of rapid creative and organisational change, including building and opening a new extension and safely navigating the organisation through the Coronavirus pandemic keeping learning and community participation projects going throughout. Katie previously worked as General Manager for the National Theatre's Learning Department. Originally qualifying as a non-practising barrister, Katie decided a career in the arts seemed much more interesting, initially working in the Business Affairs team at the Royal Opera House and then in a number smaller arts organisations, including Candoco Dance Company.

This interim appointment has been made in accordance with the Cabinet Office's [Governance Code on Public Appointments](#). The process is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Chair of the Theatres Trust is not remunerated. The Government's Governance Code requires that any significant political activity undertaken by an appointee in the last five years is declared. This is defined as holding office, public speaking, making a recordable donation or candidature for election. Katie Town has not declared any activity.

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[Scottish Secretary Alister Jack responds to November 2021 GDP](#)

News story

Our priority is achieving sustained recovery and urging people to get their boosters, says Secretary of State.



Figures for Scotland's GDP for November 2021 have been published [here](#) today.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

It's encouraging to see Scotland's economy growing again, as we start to build back from the pandemic.

The UK Government is continuing to support people and businesses in all parts of the UK to help ensure a strong recovery.

In addition, we are investing in communities right across Scotland, including through £191 million in direct UK Government grants and £1.5 billion being invested in Scottish Growth Deals. And the UK Government's multi-billion pound Plan for Jobs is working, with more people in jobs than before the pandemic.

Our Levelling Up White paper, to be published shortly, will set out how we will ensure all parts of the UK thrive and prosper.

Background

- We are directly investing £191 million UK Government funds in Scotland through the Community Renewal Fund, Community Ownership Fund and Levelling Up Fund, and £1.5 billion in City Deals in all parts of Scotland.
- The UK Government's furlough and self-employed schemes closed at the end of September 2021 after 19 months. At their peak, these two schemes supported more than 910,000 Scottish jobs alone. More than 100,000 Scottish businesses have benefitted from £4 billion of UK Government Covid loans.
- The UK Government is investing billions to help people of all ages back into work, including our £2 billion Kickstart scheme for young people, sector-based work programmes and recruitment of thousands of additional work coaches. Young people can now sign up for Kickstart until the end of March 2022.
- For the next three years [from 22/23] the Scottish Government will receive record funding through the block grant to £41 billion per year.
- The Scottish Government will receive an extra £6.5 billion of Barnett-based funding in 21/22, to help support services and businesses. In addition, in December 2021, we announced a forecast of a further £440 million in Barnett consequentials in 2021/22. This gives the Scottish Government the certainty they have requested to spend more money in advance of the usual process for confirming final Barnett consequentials at Supplementary Estimates.
- The UK Government is funding the hugely successful UK-wide vaccine programme, and continues to provide all Covid testing in Scotland outside of the NHS.

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[CMA secures changes to Xbox subscription practices](#)

Press release

The CMA has secured improvements for Xbox online players, following concerns

about Microsoft's use of auto-renewing subscriptions for online gaming services.



The changes relate to Microsoft's practices in relation to the automatic renewal of contracts for online gaming services. Microsoft's Xbox Live Gold and Game Pass products allow people to access a library of games and play together online. They are offered as memberships which are often entered into on an auto-renewal basis. This means that membership is automatically rolled over at the end of each contract period and the customer charged unless they actively take steps to stop the subscription.

As part of an investigation into the online console video gaming sector the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) identified concerns about certain features of Microsoft's auto-renewing subscriptions, in particular: whether it was clear upfront that contracts would automatically renew; how easy it was to turn off automatic renewal; and whether people may not have realised they were still paying for services they no longer used.

The CMA has secured undertakings with Microsoft which are designed to address these concerns. The improvements include:

- Better upfront information: Microsoft will provide more transparent, upfront information to help customers understand their Xbox membership – making clear, for example, that the subscription will auto-renew unless the customer turns off auto-renewal; when the subscription will auto-renew; how much it will cost; and how the customer can receive a refund after an accidental renewal
- Refunds: Microsoft will contact existing customers on recurring 12-month contracts and give them the option to end their contract and claim a pro-rata refund
- Inactive memberships: Microsoft will also contact existing customers who haven't used their memberships for a long time but are still paying. These customers will be reminded how to stop payments, and if they continue not to use their memberships, Microsoft will ultimately stop taking further payments

- Better information about price increases: Microsoft will give clearer notifications of any future price rises, and will ensure people know how to turn off auto-renewal if they don't want to pay the higher price

Michael Grenfell, Executive Director of Enforcement at the CMA, said:

Gamers need to be given clear and timely information to make informed choices when signing up for auto-renewing memberships and subscriptions. We are therefore pleased that Microsoft has given the CMA these formal undertakings to improve the fairness of their practices and protect consumers, and will be offering refunds to certain customers.

Other companies offering memberships and subscriptions that auto-renew should take note, and review their practices to ensure they comply with consumer protection law.

Full details of the undertakings are available [on the CMA's website](#).

1. For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.
2. Microsoft, as referred above, consists of Microsoft Limited and Microsoft Ireland Operations Limited.
3. The undertakings apply to contracts between Microsoft and consumers for the supply of Xbox Live Gold, Game Pass and Game Pass Ultimate (or any online video gaming product which replaces, rebrands or includes these products) which are associated with a console and subject to auto-renewal.
4. For the avoidance of doubt, the offering of these undertakings is not an admission that any person or firm has breached the law. Only a court can decide whether a breach has occurred.
5. An undertaking is a voluntary agreement a firm makes to address an enforcement authority's concerns and resolve an investigation without the need for court action.
6. The key pieces of consumer protection legislation relevant to the CMA's investigation are: the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs); Part 2 of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 (CRA); and the Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013 (CCRs). The CPRs contain a general prohibition against unfair commercial practices and specific prohibitions against misleading actions, misleading omissions and aggressive commercial practices. Part 2 of the CRA aims to protect consumers against unfair contract terms and notices, and requires contract terms to be fair and transparent. The CCRs regulate the information that should be provided to consumers before they make a purchase, cancellation rights for certain contracts and the use of pre-ticked boxes for additional payments.

[Don't miss out on up to £2,000 towards childcare costs](#)

Thousands of working families in the UK could be missing out on an opportunity to get up to £2,000 a year to help with the cost of childcare, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is reminding parents, ahead of February half term.

Tax-Free Childcare – the 20% childcare top-up – provides eligible working families with up to £500 every 3 months (or £1,000 if their child is disabled) towards the cost of holiday clubs, before and after-school clubs, childminders and nurseries, and other accredited childcare schemes.

Nearly 316,000 working families used Tax-Free Childcare across the UK in September 2021, receiving a share of £35 million in government top-up payments towards their childcare costs – an increase of about 90,000 families compared to September 2020.

Tax-Free Childcare is available for children aged up to 11, or 17 if the child has a disability. For every £8 deposited into an account, families will receive an additional £2 in government top-up.

This scheme is one of many ways the government is supporting households to raise their incomes and keep more of what they earn.

Myrtle Lloyd, HMRC's Director General for Customer Services, said:

The 20% government top-up offers working families help to pay for childcare, whether it's nursery bills, after school clubs or holiday clubs. Search 'Tax-Free Childcare' on GOV.UK to find out more.

Helen Whately, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, said:

Whether it's for holiday clubs, breakfast clubs, or childminders and nurseries, Tax-Free Childcare is a great offer that gives working parents a helping hand with their childcare costs.

This Government is committed to supporting working families which is why it's fantastic that thousands more are saving money through the Tax-Free Childcare scheme. I urge as many parents as possible to take advantage of this support.

By depositing money into their accounts, families can benefit from the 20% top-up and use the money to pay for childcare costs when they need it.

Accounts can be opened at any time of the year and can be used straight away.

For example, if parents and carers have school-aged children and use holiday clubs during school holidays, they could deposit money into their accounts throughout the year. This means they could spread the cost of childcare while also benefitting from the 20% government top-up.

Tax-Free Childcare is also available for pre-school aged children attending nurseries, childminders, or other childcare providers. Families with younger children will often have higher childcare costs than families with older children, so the tax-free savings can really make a difference.

More information about [Tax-Free Childcare](#).

Latest [Tax-Free Childcare statistics](#) were released on 17 November 2021. Data is available up to 30 September 2021.

HMRC has produced a refreshed [Tax-Free Childcare guide for parents](#), which explains the reasons and benefits for signing up to the scheme.

Each eligible child requires their own Tax-Free Childcare account. If families have more than one eligible child, they will need to register an account for each child. The 20% government top-up is then applied to deposits made for each child, not household.

Account holders must confirm their details are up to date every 3 months to continue receiving the government top-up.

[Interim report on the Legal Support for Litigants in Person grant published](#)

In April 2020, the Access to Justice Foundation and Ministry of Justice (MOJ) launched the Legal Support for Litigants in Person (LSLIP) Grant, a 2-year programme funding a range of earlier intervention services for litigants in person. LSLIP is funding 11 grant projects across England and Wales that deliver advice on a national, regional and local scale, to litigants in person at different stages of their problem within several areas of civil and family law. Partnership working and earlier intervention is at the core of all these activities, to achieve improved outcomes for clients.

To build up a collective evidence base of the benefits the programme is delivering, each grantee has collected and reported a range of quantitative and qualitative data regarding the advice they have provided, the clients reached and the impact this advice has had on improving client outcomes.

This [interim report](#) draws together the data and evidence collected so far, to report on progress towards the grant objectives. These findings are based on initial analysis and therefore are not necessarily an accurate indicator of performance at this stage or reflective of the positions that will be reached in the final report.

The report's key findings are:

- LSLIP grantees have provided a range of legal advice, practical support and procedural information to thousands of people across England and Wales with civil and family problems. The grants have enabled around 10,000 people to receive one to one personalised support on their civil and family problems, and significantly higher volumes to access public legal information and guidance.
- Most advice provided by local and regional grantees has been initial generalist advice (68% of advice) on family, employment and housing problems (nearly 75% of problems). However substantial volumes of casework and pre-court advice has been provided.
- Broadly speaking, local and regional grantees appear to be reaching a similar cohort of users to other advice services. Most clients are female (62%), between 25 and 55 (65%), and white (91%). At least a quarter of clients have a disability, but there is evidence to suggest this is an underestimation and that a high volume of clients have poor physical and mental health alongside other indicators of vulnerability.
- Partnership working has been key to LSLIP and the enhanced support available for litigants in person. Formalising referral pathways between services and sharing specialist resources have enabled organisations to expand advice across wider geographical areas and areas of law, to provide a more holistic service that can address the entirety of a client's problem.
- Early evidence suggests that the advice and support provided is improving client outcomes, including increasing client understanding of how to resolve their problem and increasing client confidence to take action promptly. This is helping to resolve problems at an earlier stage, before they reach court or tribunal.

Further data will be collected throughout the lifetime of LSLIP and these trends will be reported on in the final evaluation.

Notes:

In February 2019, the MOJ published the [Legal Support Action Plan](#) which outlined the government's commitment to a new vision for legal support, based on earlier intervention. To enable this vision, the Legal Support Action Plan contained several commitments to pilot and evaluate different forms of early legal support, to better understand what interventions work best, when, and for whom. Among these commitments was the pledge to increase the MOJ funding for the Litigants in Person Support Strategy from £1.45 million per year to £3 million for 2 years.

This increased funding, the LSLIP grant, is delivered by the MOJ in partnership with the Access to Justice Foundation. The Access to Justice

Foundation is a charitable organisation with a wealth of knowledge and experience in the legal support sphere, and significant experience managing grants across the advice sector.

The Ministry of Justice and Access to Justice Foundation worked closely together to develop the LSLIP grant, which enhances the legal support available across England and Wales by funding new, expanded or scaled-up services that support the earliest possible interventions for litigants in person.