

20 July 2020



Caroline Dinenage MP
Minister for Digital and Culture
Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2QB

The Little Theatre Guild – COVID 19.

Dear Minister.

We are writing on behalf of over 115 amateur theatres across the UK to seek clarification on whether the recently published government guidance, of 17 July 2020, allows non-professional theatres to re-open in line with professional theatres. Other recently published guidance, 11 July 2020, appears to treat the amateur sector differently from the professional sector so on behalf of all LTG Members, we are seeking clarity.

The Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain (LTG) is the umbrella organisation for its 115 member theatres across the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. Each of our theatres is a local community asset, run entirely by amateurs, with seat capacities ranging from 48 to over 300. A large proportion of those theatres are part of our cultural heritage that were set up and have been in existence for over 150 years, with others from the early 20th century. Some occupying historical buildings from a 13th Century church, ancient Corn Exchanges to Railway Arches and Purpose-Built theatres. During the last year, our member theatre's income was around £7.3m, playing to 638,496 audience members through 942 productions over 5,800 performances. Our Website www.littletheatreguild.org will show you the range of theatres across the country.

On 11 July 2020 we were advised that Theatres could commence with outside productions, this was welcome news to several of our member theatres. However, on reading the guidance the relaxation of rules is related only to professional theatres; non-professional theatres are required to abide by 2 households indoors and maximum of six households outdoors. The guidance is copied here

“Professionals working in the performing arts are permitted to return to their activities in line with this guidance.

Non-professionals (meaning those participating in performing arts other than for work purposes), or groups which include non-professionals, may refer to this guidance for their activities, but must at all times do so in line with government legislation and [guidance on meeting people outside your household](#).

The Little Theatre Guild
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Non-professionals should currently not engage in singing or playing wind and brass instruments with other people given these activities pose a potentially higher risk of transmission and whilst research is ongoing. DCMS has commissioned further scientific studies to be carried out to develop robust scientific data for these activities. Existing and emerging evidence will be analysed to assist the development of policy and guidelines.”

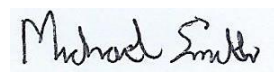
Whilst we can understand the science behind not engaging in singing or playing wind and brass instruments, we are however at a loss to understand the difference between an Andrew Lloyd Webber owned theatre and a Little Guild Member theatre that could open and give live productions both outside and now according to the latest guidance inside. The science behind allowing professional theatre and non-professional theatre can be no different, as we have recently seen between professional and non-professional cricket.

It would therefore appear to be a policy decision to restrict non-professional theatre. We would ask you to reconsider this policy and allow non-professional theatres to re-open in line with the professional sector. The LTG is an associate member of UK Theatre and do not understand why our members are being treated differently to every other member of UK Theatre.

Without the amateur sector, which is a training ground for many professional actors including the likes of our Patron Sir Kenneth Branagh, our recent Patron Sir Ian McKellen, Kevin Whalley, Jeremy Irons and Dame Judi Dench to name but a few, the professional theatre would not exist. It is generally accepted that the UK is unique in the extraordinarily strong tradition of non-professional theatre and unusual in that it has more than 115 venues specifically designed to produce live non-professional theatre. Our theatres are no different to professional theatres insofar as the income from Pantomimes are often a key area that enables them to stay afloat during the rest of the year.

Please treat us no differently to our professional counterparts! Perhaps you would find it helpful if we were to discuss our concerns directly with you via a Zoom link. In the meantime should you require any additional information please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Michael Smith
Chairman.