



2 May 2023

Dear [REDACTED]

**Soho Poly: Application for a new premises licence at 16 Riding House Street**

I work for the University of Westminster (the “University”) and am responsible for the Application for a new premises (“the Application”) for the Soho Poly. As there have been objections to the Application by our local neighbours, including yourself, I wanted to write to you to explain the need for the Application and to give you some additional information about it.

As you may know, the Soho Poly also has a rich history. It was a much-loved theatre in the 1970s and 1980s, and writers and actors such as Hanif Kureishi, Simon Callow and Harriet Walter cut their teeth there. The University rediscovered the Soho Poly in the basement of 16 Riding House Street in 2012 and knowing that very few small venues from this period remain in London, the University put together plans to restore it, and to create a vibrant cultural space, which would honour the history of the building and provide a vibrant performance space and venue of community engagement. We have been working with the National Lottery Heritage Fund to preserve this history and continue the venue’s legacy. Most importantly of all, the Soho Poly was known for being friendly, open and inclusive. As we go forward, we are committed to ensuring that it continues to be a place where people can come together to share their stories and experience the transformative power of the arts.

Our aim is for the Soho Poly to become an integral part of the local community – an accessible and welcoming space, where people from all walks of life can come together to enjoy arts and cultural activities. We are committed to providing workshops and performances that cater to the unique needs and interests of the area. We have forged strong partnerships with organisations such as Open Age, the Fitzrovia Centre and the Westminster LGBT forum. Events in recent years have already brought residents together for activities including lunchtime play readings, small scale concerts, craft workshops and educational talks. During the pandemic, we also continued to support vulnerable communities online.

Historically, the Soho Poly had an entrance on Riding Street. As a standalone, community focused venue (which will be managed as a separate entity to the rest of the University), it is appropriate for the Soho Poly to have its own licence and entrance. This will help to maintain a separate identity from the University. It is therefore proposed that the original Riding House Street entrance be used for licenced events in the Soho Poly.

**Estates, Planning and Services**

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Separately, the University has a premises licence for the building 4 – 12 Little Titchfield Street. This licence will not be altered in any way, and the conditions that are in place on that licence will remain, including that for licensed activities in those premises, all guests and attendees will enter and exit through the Little Titchfield Street entrance (save for in case of emergencies).

I do want to emphasize that we are not opening a student bar or any other type of regular drinking establishment in the venue. The space is a cultural venue. The space has already been used for non-licensable activities such as community writing workshops, and on these occasions there has been no disturbance to the local area. The capacity of the space is limited to 60 people; ensuring that this number of people exit the theatre quietly at the end of a performance will be manageable for the venue staff.

The University is mindful of its neighbours, and its place in the community. When the application was made, the University applied for the normal core hours for a cultural venue (being 9am to midnight as set out in Westminster Council's Statement of Licencing Policy). However, having considered the objections that have been raised, the University appreciates that the hours are a concern to some of our neighbours. As it is very unlikely that any of our cultural events would run until midnight, I am very happy to amend the operating hours of the theatre space to finish at 11:00pm instead.

I do hope this has addressed your concerns, and if you would like any further information about the application or the Soho Poly theatre space, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at [a.fleming@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:a.fleming@westminster.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely,



Alexander Fleming  
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