

The Prime Minister has reappointed Professor Lynda Nead, Ben Elliot and Nigel Webb as Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum

Professor Lynda Nead

Lynda is Pevsner Professor of History of Art at Birkbeck, University of London. She has published widely on the history of British art and culture, including studies of Victorian art and the city and, more recently, on the visual culture of post-war Britain.

She is a Fellow of the British Academy and of the Royal Historical Society, a Member of the Academia Europaea and sits on the academic advisory boards of a number of museums and galleries, including the Museum of London and the National Gallery, London. She has also been a member of the Leverhulme Trust Research Awards Advisory Council.

Ben Elliot

Ben is a British businessman, investor and philanthropist. He co-founded the Quintessentially Group in 2000 and has a number of commercial interests across hospitality, retail and tech sectors. In 2008, he founded the Quintessentially Foundation, which has raised over £14m for charities to improve the health, education and welfare of disadvantaged people and communities across the UK.

Ben was appointed as the Government's first-ever Food Surplus and Waste Champion in 2018 – a role he still holds – and actively campaigns for the reduction of food waste by manufacturers, retailers and households. He has been Co-Chair of the Conservative Party since July 2019.

Ben is a Trustee of the Eranda Rothschild Foundation, Chair of the Philanthropy Board of the Royal Albert Hall and on the Board of the Centre for Policy Studies.

Nigel Webb

Nigel is a Chartered Surveyor and a member of the Group Executive Committee and Head of Development at The British Land Company Plc, one of Europe's largest Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) and one of the country's leading property developers.

Nigel has over 35 years of experience in property investment and development and has been responsible for over 12m sq ft of development including some of London's landmark buildings. His experience includes developing projects such as The Leadenhall Building ("Cheesegrater"), The Broadgate Tower, The Willis

Building, the UBS headquarters at 5 Broadgate, Ropemaker Place, Clarges Mayfair and development of the Regents' Place campus. Nigel also Chairs the Be the Business Construction Productivity Taskforce.

These roles are not remunerated. These reappointments have 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 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. Lynda Nead and Nigel Webb have not declared any activity. Ben Elliot has declared he is Co-Chair of the Conservative Party.

Charting HMRC's progress this financial year

This is a unique financial year for HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), as the department continues to be at the heart of the government's COVID-19 response, moving rapidly to deliver financial support to millions of businesses and individuals affected by the pandemic and measures to control the virus.

The pandemic has reinforced the need for a flexible, resilient and responsive tax and customs system – and demonstrated HMRC's competence and capability to deliver it.

HMRC's other priorities at this time are to help businesses understand the new post-Brexit rules and support customers to pay tax on time and with ease, while protecting the tax and payments system from fraudulent attacks.

Supporting customers during the COVID-19 pandemic

Like other service organisations, it's been a tough year of urgent and unexpected challenges for HMRC. But despite the impact of the pandemic, the department has successfully delivered unprecedented financial support schemes and done all it can to offer the best possible service to its customers, through an almost entirely home-based operation.

The Chancellor extended the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme throughout quarter 3 and announced that the schemes would continue to offer support until April, with HMRC continuing to manage tax compliance and tax debts in a way that is sensitive to the needs of customers.

As of midnight on 13 December 2020, HMRC had enabled 1.2 million employers to claim £46.4 billion for 9.9 million furloughed jobs through the Coronavirus

Job Retention Scheme.

HMRC also provided £18.5 billion of support to the self-employed, with almost 7 million claims made across the three Self-Employment Income Support Scheme grants.

HMRC launched a new coronavirus helpline in the space of 5 days during March 2020, and up to 22 January 2021 had handled more than 1.28 million calls across this helpline and others linked to specific support schemes.

Overall, call waiting times across our phone helplines have been longer than HMRC would like and we apologise for the inconvenience this causes to customers at busy times.

From October to December 2020, HMRC received 7.6 million calls and, on average, they were answered in 11:47 minutes, a similar time to the first quarter of the financial year. But it was significantly longer than during the second quarter, when the average answer time was 8:55 minutes.

This reflects the high level of customer demand during the national and regional lockdowns in November and December, as well as HMRC continuing its need to divert resources towards the government's financial support schemes.

While this is clearly not as good as HMRC would like, the department is proud that it has kept its core services running throughout this time of crisis, alongside its vital COVID-19 financial support role, while expanding alternative ways to provide customer support.

HMRC has increased COVID-19 webchats as an alternative to phone calls, holding more than 441,000 webchats with customers up to 22 January – and running nearly 600 webinars on COVID-19 support topics, with more than 290,000 attendees.

At the same time, HMRC's digital services are giving customers most of the support they need, 24 hours a day, without having to contact the helplines, and since the pandemic began, many more customers have successfully used the department's online services to get the information they need.

HMRC continues to record high customer satisfaction with its digital services – 85.7% in October to December of last year, almost 3 percentage points higher than the best quarterly result in 2019 to 2020.

HMRC has also made it easier for more Self Assessment customers to apply online to spread their tax bill over up to 12 months. Since October 2020, we've already seen 46,700 Time to Pay plans set up online with a total value of £147.7 million.

The department also said that Self Assessment customers who cannot file their tax return by the 31 January deadline will not receive a late filing penalty as long as they file online by 28 February.

It has been a difficult 9 months, with HMRC working at stretch and speed, serving customers as best as it can and continuing to chase non-compliance.

It has moved staff to support the coronavirus helpline and support schemes and recruited about 1,500 new temporary staff into customer service and compliance roles.

HMRC is continuing to deliver on its purpose and is focused on helping customers understand what they need to do to claim their entitlements, get their tax right, and find guidance and support if they need it.

Tax receipts and compliance

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is also having an inevitable effect on tax receipts, compliance yield and customer debt, all of which will take time to recover.

A consequence of taxpayers being able to defer payments is that debt is abnormally high. HMRC is currently holding £65 billion of debt, around £45 billion more than this time last year – and it estimates the debt balance at the end of March 2021 will be between £54 billion and £70 billion.

By the end of December, HMRC had collected £394 billion in tax, compared to £457 billion at the same point in 2019.

The total compliance yield from April 2020 to December 2020 was £16.8 billion. By the same period in 2019, compliance yield was £26 billion, although this was skewed by a small number of very large, one-off successful litigations during 2019 to 2020.

In these unprecedented circumstances, HMRC is rightly prioritising support for customers in urgent need, taking a sympathetic approach to those struggling to pay their tax or file their returns.

HMRC always steps in on behalf of honest taxpayers to tackle the minority who don't play by the rules and is continuing to use its criminal and civil powers where it believes someone is trying to cheat the system.

HMRC is also working hard in rejecting or blocking thousands of fraudulent claims against COVID-19 support schemes, starting post-payment compliance work, helping customers to correct any mistakes made in applications but also identifying and tackling instances of fraud and abuse. Six arrests have already been made for suspected fraud against these schemes, with additional criminal investigations underway.

Looking ahead

In the final quarter of this financial year, and beyond, HMRC's immediate priorities remain to help customers cope with the economic impact of COVID-19, support them to pay tax on time, and protect the tax and payments system from fraudulent attacks.

HMRC's other urgent priority is to help businesses navigate the new rules following the biggest border change for more than 40 years, after the UK reached a Free Trade Agreement with the EU which came into force on 1 January

2021.

The deal provides much needed clarity on changes that will affect hundreds of thousands of businesses if they trade within the EU and HMRC is continuing to work on publishing information and communicating to help customers understand what the deal means for them.

HMRC recognises the immense pressure that many people are facing at this time and is doing everything it can to help its customers and teams.

HMRC's message is clear: if you can pay your taxes, you should do so – but if you're struggling, it will listen and do its best to support you. Anyone concerned about paying their tax is urged to contact HMRC as early as possible to discuss ways to help.

You can see further information in [HMRC's quarterly performance update](#).

Charity – its unifying force is needed more than ever, yet it's at risk like never before

Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I can't think of a better place to make one of my last speeches as Chair of the Charity Commission than at a registered charity. I'm also delighted you've invited me, because the Social Market Foundation has distinguished itself over the years as a meeting place where those of all political persuasions and none can debate freely and productively. I will do my best to honour that tradition today.

I certainly want to reflect on what I've learned in my three years as Commission Chair, to talk about what I and the whole organisation have achieved in that time to help increase the benefit of charity to society – and also to outline the work still to do which will fall to my successor.

But more than that I want to explain the thinking that has lain behind what we have been trying to do, which I believe is fundamental not just to the future viability and prosperity of the charitable sector, but also to the broader health of our society.

It can be summed up briefly as this. That if charities – or indeed any other institution, and anybody else operating in the public eye – are to survive and thrive, we are all going to have to be far more respectful of other people's points of view. We are all relying on each other.

But before I get on to charities more specifically, let me take a step back by examining the intense world in which we live and operate today. The levels

of scrutiny we all face are immense. The speed with which we can pass judgement on others is unprecedented, as is the ability to seek out those who agree with us, often to the exclusion of anyone else.

All of this makes outrage at scale much easier and, sometimes, the entire object of the exercise: all the better to make yourself heard in the current cacophony. Of course, that approach often comes at a cost. Nuanced disagreements descend into polarised divisions, motives are impugned, guilt by association becomes the order of the day. People parody others and in so doing become parodies of themselves.

In this environment a better understanding of the differences between us and the actual reasons behind them has never been more difficult or more essential. The current pandemic may have frozen all of us in place for the time being, but the places we find ourselves in reflect the fact that we are perhaps more segregated than we have been in living memory – whether that is by choice or by a lack of it.

Most, perhaps all of us on this call, have been to places and experienced things that people within living memory couldn't even begin to comprehend. These experiences help to shape who we are, what we think, and how we feel. They are part of us. We have these things in common, but we also live alongside people who've had other experiences, who haven't had the same opportunities or who've had different ones. And yet we have seldom had less contact with those people than at any time in the modern era.

However far we travel when we can safely do so again, we really do need to get out more closer to home.

That need to understand and respect experiences and values different from our own was important before the recent political shocks of the past five years. And I think it's even more important now.

Either we acknowledge what has gone on around us, learn from it and adapt, or we ignore it as a momentary aberration, seek to learn nothing at all and just hope it won't happen again. I think that would be both wrong in principle and counterproductive in practice.

Let me say why – and I'll draw on my own personal experience.

Over my career I have been fortunate to work in some of Britain's finest public institutions – from the civil service to the BBC; and I have served Prime Ministers, whether working as a member of staff inside No 10 or as a member of the Cabinet.

In all of these roles the values that have mattered most are those that I share with the people I was born and brought up with in the East Midlands – close to blue-wall/red-wall territory.

And what are those beliefs? That rules matter and should be applied equally to everyone, that people in power have a particular responsibility to lead by example, and that knowledge – while important – counts for little without understanding. These are not outlandish values – they're held by millions of

decent, respectable people up and down the country – and nor are the opinions they give rise to fringe or extreme.

Ignoring these voices or losing touch with the values that underpin them seems to me an act of monumental hubris. For too long, too many of us in positions of authority have allowed moral certitude, reinforced by over-confidence, to harden into disdain for other people's points of view and a reluctance to be held accountable by wider public opinion.

Over the past 15 years we've seen the consequences of that kind of attitude from the financial crisis, to the scandal over MPs' expenses, and the loss in trust in news media.

I applied and was appointed Chair of the Charity Commission because I could see that erosion in public trust and confidence had begun to reach parts of the charity world too. Household names not behaving as they should; putting their own reputations ahead of doing the right thing and not recognising their broader responsibility to Charity as a whole. At that time, public trust and confidence in charity was at its lowest level ever.

Some organised voices opposed my appointment because of my lack of experience and understanding when it came to the charity world. But that was a feature not a bug. I wasn't there to plead the case for charities to the public, but to make sure that a broader range of voices from the public were taken seriously by charities, especially the large and more established. And to do so because Charity matters – and it relies on everyone's support.

So, from the very start of my term as Chair, I led the Board and worked with Helen Stephenson and the rest of the Executive team to place regulating in the public interest at the heart of the Commission's work. This meant making us more responsive and inclusive in the way we listen and respond to different parts of the public, including volunteers and charity supporters up and down the country.

We moved to reassure people that their legitimate concerns over, often quite small things, would not be trivialised or ignored. We also emphasised that charities needed to be driven by their purposes in the way they go about their business not just in the difference they make. This means being respectful of basic public expectations and behaving in a way that is distinctive from other types of organisations. And over the last couple of years we have begun to see a modest recovery in public trust and confidence. This is not just a nice objective if you can achieve it, it is a statutory responsibility of the Charity Commission written into law, and for good reason.

Covid has brought home both the power of Charity and its essential fragility. The power it has to harness our generosity and goodwill for the benefit of others; but also how much Charity relies on the support it is given, in small and myriad ways, as people go about our daily lives – and how vulnerable it is to any disruption in those routines.

As a nation our charitable impulse runs as deep as it ever has. Over the last

twelve months people have found new and ingenious ways to demonstrate kindness, salute courage and lend practical help to one another. From clapping for carers and NHS workers, organising mutual support via WhatsApp, to supporting the inspiring exploits of the late Captain Sir Tom Moore – whose loss this week is mourned by us all. And right now, people like St John Ambulance and the RVS enrolling local volunteers throughout the UK to help distribute the Covid vaccine in their own communities. Indeed, many charities are having to work harder than ever, adapting to a dramatic loss of income at a time of increased demand: they are having to attract new supporters or find new ways of providing support to the people who rely on them irrespective of the pandemic.

Charities remain the most effective way of bringing people together in the name of something bigger, more important or more urgent than those things which sometimes keep us apart.

This power that Charity has derives from the feeling that it belongs to all of us in one form or another, wherever we come from. That sense of genuine common ownership is rare and precious in our current world; and we should not give it up deliberately or through neglect. Charities can challenge things, charities can shake things up, they can even change the world, but they can't, and they shouldn't go out of their way to divide people.

If Charity is to remain at the forefront of our national life it cannot afford to be captured by those who want to advance or defend their own view of the world to the exclusion of all others. Charities can adapt to the latest social and cultural trends but there is a real risk of generating unnecessary controversy and division by picking sides in a battle some have no wish to fight.

Many seek out charities as an antidote to politics and division not as another front on which to wage a war against political enemies, and they have the right to be respected. Telling these people that they'll get a fair hearing if they object to the politicisation of their favourite charities or if they take a different view is not in itself a political act; it is the role of a responsible regulator.

Hard as it may be to believe sometimes, away from Westminster or beyond the reach of Twitter, there are people who do not have definitive opinions, ready for instant expression about Brexit, the root causes of inequality, the exercise and limits of free speech, or how best to tell the story of Britain. They are the backbone of so many of our charities. They let their donations, their volunteering, their fundraising do the talking. Just because these people do not shout doesn't mean they have no right to be heard. I have tried to make their views count more during my time at the Charity Commission, I hope and believe my successor will do the same.

They will of course inherit other challenges facing the sector and its regulator. Public expectations matter. When it comes to charities this means seeing motives translated into action and the job being gone about in the right way. Standards in terms of behaviour, efficiency and effectiveness are more important than structures and the public feels entitled to make certain

assumptions about registered charity status that go beyond recipients simply sticking to the letter of the law. And that doesn't change even during a pandemic and when many charities are under immense pressure.

Ensuring these expectations are met even as the range of bodies trying to become charities and the scope of things we ask charities to do keep on growing is incredibly important if the legal and financial benefits of charitable status are to continue enjoying public support.

Then there's the challenge of registered charity status itself keeping pace with the times. Charities themselves aren't the only outlet for people who want to be charitable. The charity sector needs to embrace a new generation of organisations with their own ideas for strengthening their communities and wider society.

In my view the charity register should not be like a private members' club; difficult to join but offering a place for life once you get in. Instead it should be a snapshot that captures the vast array of efforts being made in this country to improve lives and strengthen society at any given time. The Charity Commission would be better equipped to do this if it could make registration more straightforward in some cases, combined with more power and greater freedom to remove moribund charities or those involved in wrongdoing from the register.

Finally, there's what to do when things go wrong. The reason why the Charity Commission has placed such importance on the public interest during my time as Chair is that the way charities go about their business matters as much as the difference they make. How do we know this? Because the public tells us so.

It's important to be able to draw broader lessons from cases where it is appropriate to do so, to show that there is an underlying purpose to how the Commission discharges its statutory responsibilities. We began to do this while I was Chair and I hope that as a practice it continues. More people are becoming aware of what the Charity Commission is trying to do on their behalf, and that can only help charities up and down the country who need all the support they can get to recover from the pandemic and to play their full part in helping the country to do the same.

The reason Charity matters is because it is a reflection of us at our best. Encapsulating our generosity of spirit, our impulse to give what we can and to do what we can to improve and enrich the lives of others, whether they are on our own doorstep or thousands of miles away. And like us charities come in all shapes and sizes; large and small, volunteer-led and professionally run, service-providers funded by local and national government, and the essential but often unglamorous gap-filers fiercely independent of the state.

Some find this lack of coherence frustrating. They would like a much more focused, organised and coordinated sector speaking to the government and the outside world with one voice, usually their own. But looking back with the advantage of my three years at the Charity Commission I think it is that very variation which is the source of Charity's strength.

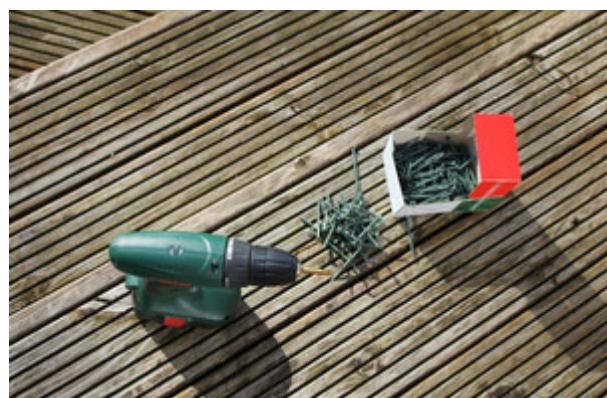
There are charities which bring like-minded people together, charities who unite unlike minds, different charities who want diametrically different things. Together they can all help to improve lives and strengthen society within the legal framework of charitable status.

With so much aiding and abetting polarisation these days, it has been a privilege to oversee one of the few unifying forces that stand for more pluralism in our lives. So, to the 168,000 charities on our register and the 700,000 trustees who are legally responsible for them and are custodians of something which is precious to all of us, I would just like to end by saying to them: "thank you".

Civil news: new civil application fixer service launched

News story

A new service for law firms and other providers of civil legal aid is now available and will help to save time during the initial decision-making stages of applications.



The Civil Application Fixer service is now available for all law firms and other providers of civil legal aid to use if it is thought the Legal Aid Agency (LAA) has made a mistake in processing an application, amendment or means assessment on the Client and Cost Management System (CCMS).

This new service is in operation now and will help to reduce appeals and save time during the initial decision-making stages of civil applications.

What is fixer?

The application fixer service works in a similar way to the well-established Civil Claim Fix service and should only be used when you believe the LAA has made an error.

The LAA has developed this process in response to the decision-making survey run by the Legal Aid Practitioners Group (LAPG) and subsequent joint working with a successful pilot of the scheme.

The email address is applicationfixer@justice.gov.uk.

When to use fixer

The application fixer aims to correct errors made by the LAA at the earliest possible opportunity. If you believe we have made an error, please email fixer detailing the case reference and why you believe an error has been made.

We will only review the decision based on the information submitted originally and any additional new information will require the appeal route.

Examples of issues the fixer process can be used for:

- an application incorrectly rejected or refused
- if you believe information provided has not been considered in the decision
- asked for documents or information that have already been provided
- not granted the cost limit requested when delegating
- where COVID-19 contingency arrangements have not been followed

This list is not exhaustive and the LAA will look at anything where a mistake has been made by the agency based on the original information. This is not an appeal or review route.

The LAA aims to review submissions within 24 hours (Monday to Friday) and if we agree there has been an LAA error we will rectify this at the earliest opportunity.

If the LAA believes, based on the information provided, the decision was correct we will notify you that you need to follow the appeal and review route for challenging a decision.

Initial feedback of the service shows that it saves time during the initial decision-making process and reduces the number of appeals.

Law firms and other providers of legal aid can start using the application fixer email as of today.

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Highways England welcomes business sign-up to A303 Stonehenge scheme

The company launched the A303 Stonehenge business directory in December, extending an invite for small and medium-sized businesses to get involved in the transformational dualling scheme and tunnel project, and in less than two months a total of 161 companies are now registered – half of those from the Wiltshire locality.

A virtual Meet the Buyer event was held on 21 January, in which more than 130 people heard from Highways England's project team and preliminary works contractors Wessex Archaeology Ltd and Osborne Ltd, about upcoming opportunities to play a part in the scheme.

The virtual event was the first in a series of engagement activities planned with local and regional SMEs ahead of fieldwork and preliminary works starting later this year.

David Bullock, Highways England Project Manager for the A303 Stonehenge scheme, said:

We're delighted by the response so far, and we'd like to see that number double again in the coming weeks to enable local and regional SMEs to gain access to business opportunities within the scheme.

We need businesses large and small to help build the scheme, but we understand that small and medium-sized enterprises face challenges in getting a foot in the door on projects of this scale, so we want to break down any barriers by standardising terms and conditions, minimising requirements and applying a fair and prompt payment initiative.

The project has numerous benefits, not only in improving journey reliability and enhancing the World Heritage Site landscape, but also in unlocking economic growth in the South West.

The preliminary work will provide initial opportunities within the next six months or so with greater potential for SMEs ahead, once Highways England appoints its main contractor later this year, or early 2022.

Highways England is already working closely with the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Business West, the Federation of Small Businesses, Salisbury and District Chamber of Commerce and Salisbury BID, and has also partnered nationally with the Supply Chain Sustainability School to provide free online training.

This helps smaller companies to upskill and places them in a better position

to tender for work on larger infrastructure projects, such as the A303 Stonehenge upgrade.

Deborah Fraser, South West Director of the CBI (Confederation of British Industry), said:

Upgrades to the full A303/A30/A358 corridor will drastically improve connectivity between the South West and the rest of the country, and open new doors for businesses in advanced manufacturing, low carbon and digital technologies, and tourism and hospitality.

Those new opportunities begin with the construction phase, and it's encouraging to see so many local SMEs expressing an interest in lending their expertise to this transformative project.

At a time when so many businesses are worried about their future, these works can inject fresh optimism in the South West and boost regional productivity, while delivering tangible proof that the government is serious about fulfilling its levelling up pledges across the country.

Of the companies registered so far, a large percentage are involved in civil engineering, building and civil works, security, facilities management and landscaping, together with other professional services such as business supply, catering, cleaning, environmental and waste management.

Robin Trevett of Salisbury and District Chamber of Commerce said:

A project such as this presents a host of opportunities for local business, something both the Salisbury and District Chamber of Commerce and Salisbury Business Improvement District fully support.

We look forward to seeing future events as the project develops and ultimately, the opportunity for our members to play their part in this major project.

Businesses interested in being a part of the A303 Stonehenge project are urged to [register their details](#). Information will then be passed to the relevant contractors.

Highways England has recently unveiled its ambition for the A303 Stonehenge project through the voices of the people it touches most, including businesses and local communities. The visionary video can be seen here:

[visionary video](#)

For more details and updates on the [A303 Stonehenge scheme website](#), people can log on to the scheme website, and for any further queries, companies can

email info@a303stonehenge.co.uk

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.