

Towards a National Youth Folk Music Ensemble

Findings from an open consultation on the creation of a national youth folk music ensemble for England



Produced for the English Folk Dance and Song Society by



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#youthfolkmusic

Preface

This report is a summary of findings resulting from an open consultation led by Sound Connections, on behalf of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), and attended by experts representing folk music-making in all its diversity. The positive responses and inspiring ideas collected throughout this consultation have helped us to draw together some initial recommendations on the future potential for a national youth folk music ensemble, in terms of its artistic ethos, its structure and the outcomes that it would deliver for both the folk music sector and for young people themselves.

EFDSS, along with other folk organisations, performers, educators and enthusiasts from across the country, have shown a keen interest in creating a national youth folk music ensemble, which would aim to raise the profile of folk music throughout England, and provide high quality musical experiences for young people. With young musicians at the heart of this project, the ensemble would be an opportunity to build on the work of existing folk groups from across the country, and collaborate with these organisations to create a national collective of talented young folk musicians.

**Philip Flood, Director
Sound Connections**

About the English Folk Dance and Song Society

The English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) is the national folk arts development organisation for England, existing to champion the English traditional arts – music, song, dance, storytelling, customs and traditions – as part of the rich and diverse cultural landscape of the UK. Established in 1932, with roots going back to 1898, it is based at Cecil Sharp House, its dedicated folk arts centre in Camden, North London.

EFDSS' Education department works to raise the profile and develop the practice of folk music, dance and other arts within education. It creates and delivers education projects for children, young people and adults, in formal education and community settings, at Cecil Sharp House, across London, and around the country, often in partnership with other organisations. This includes The Full English, its current national digital archive and learning project funded by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund.

EFDSS' current work with youth folk music includes the newly formed London Youth Folk Ensemble, *Get Your Folk On!* holiday courses, and taster projects with seven London Music Education Hubs, principally funded by the National Foundation for Youth Music. It also includes *Living Song*, a folk song and composition project jointly devised and delivered with the Royal College of Music Junior Department since 2008, and working in partnership with London's Centre for Young Musicians since 2011 to deliver two new folk ensembles as part of their Saturday programme.



Rachel Elliott is Education Director for EFDSS, responsible for the development of its England-wide education programme. She initiated, framed and commissioned this consultation. To contact her email: rachel@efdss.org

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www.efdss.org

About Sound Connections

Sound Connections have been commissioned as independent consultants to produce this report in open consultation with a wide cohort of folk professionals spanning the country.

Sound Connections is a leading music organisation in London with over ten years' experience in sector strengthening, research and advocacy. We have produced strategies, reports and evaluations for DCMS, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the National Foundation for Youth Music and London Councils. Our advocacy work reaches some 4,500 member organisations and practitioners, and influences regional and national music education structures through our membership of the Mayor's Music Education Steering Group, Music Mark and the National Music Council. Sound Connections is a partner of all 29 Music Education Hubs across London.



Philip Flood is the Director of Sound Connections, leading on advocacy across the music education sector. Philip's previous roles include Head of LSO Discovery, Education Director for Spitalfields Music, and Head of Music and Media at a large London FE college. He is a member of the Mayor's Music Education Steering Group and an advisor on music education to a number of arts organisations, including the PRS for Music Foundation.



Lawrence Becko is the Programme Manager at Sound Connections. He has 10 years' experience working in community music and media, and previously managed the Birmingham Youth Music Action Zone. An experienced researcher and evaluator, Lawrence has produced mapping and briefings for the music sector, and written for Channel 4 and Arts Professional. He is a published composer whose work has been released on electronic folk label Static Caravan.



Siân Dicker is our Research Assistant and has worked closely with us to produce this report. She is a member of Wired4Music, the young Londoners' music council hosted by Sound Connections, where she has set up and coordinated an entirely youth-led choir. She is a singer, currently studying for a BMus at City University where she specialises in opera.

INTRODUCTION

Young people are making folk music in a diverse range of contexts and environments across England: from playing at home with friends or family to performing in local venues, from structured activity in schools to exciting music programmes run by a growing number of folk arts organisations, music education hubs, community music organisations and music venues working across the community.

The English Folk Dance and Song Society has commissioned this short-term consultation exercise to seek the views of people involved or interested in folk music education on the desirability and feasibility of working towards creating a national youth folk music ensemble.

Very few parameters were set or assumptions made about the nature of a potential national youth folk music ensemble. The process began with no fixed view of the outcome or how it could be delivered. However, it was agreed that an ensemble would be likely to:

- ◉ Recruit players from across England
- ◉ Focus mainly on instrumental music
- ◉ Have a significant focus on English traditional folk music - but also include folk music from the wider British Isles and beyond, and include newly composed music drawing from the tradition
- ◉ Aim to complement and build on existing youth folk music provision
- ◉ Be structured to include some form of outreach programme to help foster the growth of local and regional youth folk music ensembles and courses, particularly where there is currently little provision
- ◉ May include more than one ensemble or group, perhaps catering for different musical levels and/or age groups, that work together in different ways

Methodology

The consultation was facilitated by Sound Connections, on behalf of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. The consultation aimed to find out whether people involved in this sector felt that creating a national youth folk music ensemble would be positive for the genre. It also aimed to seek views from young people currently involved in folk music, for example those participating in local or regional ensembles, holiday courses and festivals. The consultation took the form of:

- An online survey open to anyone interested in completing it, resulting in 159 responses which are discussed further below
- Follow up interviews with a sample of individuals involved in folk music education and project management
- A roundtable discussion involving leading voices of the folk music and music education sectors.

The roundtable discussion panel was hosted by EFDSS at Cecil Sharp House on Monday 20 January 2014. Throughout the day there were detailed discussions regarding key elements of the project, such as format, structure, logistics and practicalities. Professionals who are actively involved with folk music across the country attended the discussion. Sound Connections presented information that had been gathered and researched from the initial survey, whilst EFDSS gave an overview as to why they were consulting on setting up a national ensemble.

Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted by Philip Flood to further explore themes with a sample of respondents and capture the views of those who were unable to attend the roundtable discussion.

This initial report will be shared with respondents across the folk and wider music education sector, and will inform further planning and development.

FINDINGS

1. Support for a national folk music ensemble

The initial survey, sent out to gauge support for the idea of a national youth folk ensemble, demonstrated wide-reaching support from a broad range of stakeholders.

The survey was completed by a diverse cohort of respondents, all with an interest in, or link to, folk music.

66% of the 159 respondents were aged 26 and over. Of these, 19% of participants described themselves as either teachers or music leaders working regularly with young people within music. A fifth of those who took the survey were folk artists, or performed in folk ensembles. Fourteen people stated that they were parents of young people interested in folk music.

34% of 159 survey participants were aged 25 and under, meaning that the results of this survey have been influenced by a strong youth perspective. This breaks down as just over 18% listing themselves as youth participants (up to 18 years of age) and a further 15% being 19 – 25 years of age.

96% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a national youth folk music ensemble would help raise the profile of folk music amongst the wider music education sector, further reinforced by 84% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that a national folk ensemble would raise the profile of folk music amongst young people as well as the wider community.

90% of respondents felt that a national ensemble would contribute significantly to more opportunities for young people to perform folk music. Similarly, 92% agreed or strongly agreed that it would enable more high quality folk music experiences for young people.

2. Ethos

At the heart of the discussions around a national ensemble was an exploration of the ethos of such a programme, and what this might mean for producers, practitioners and participants.

2.1 Authenticity

In order to explore the ethos of the ensemble, roundtable attendees were asked: *‘How can we ensure that an authentic folk character is at the heart of the artistic direction of the ensemble?’*

It was felt that ‘traditional’ instrumentation and folk repertoire could contribute towards developing a folk character for the ensemble. However, it was apparent that there are certain stigmas surrounding the term ‘authentic’ itself and many shared the view that we should perhaps be referring to a folk ‘context’ rather than an ‘authentic folk character’. One person asked, *“What are we being authentic to?”*

Some thought was also given as to how best to combine traditional and contemporary understandings of folk music. It was felt that a large national ensemble could draw on traditional folk repertoire and also incorporate regional traditions. Others felt that the ensemble could develop new interpretations of folk music. This led to a wide-ranging conversation, which covered everything from instrumentation to repertoire, and the structure to the size of the ensemble, discussed further below.

2.2 Access and excellence

Roundtable attendees also discussed the duality of promoting access whilst focusing on excellence. A question was raised as to whether this should be an openly accessible scheme, promoting involvement in folk music and progression, or a ‘centre for excellence’, providing high quality opportunities for the best young folk musicians in the country.

The group unanimously agreed that the experience itself should be excellent, but opinions on the ‘level’ of participants varied. Some respondents voiced concern that the ensemble may become too exclusive or “elitist”, reducing accessibility if it relied too heavily on the idea of musical excellence. Some felt that the project should be readily available for all to be involved in, regardless of age, standard or experience, with a belief that folk music is for everyone. Questions were also raised over how to measure excellence whilst others felt that a small group of highly skilled players would present an ideal opportunity to raise the profile of folk music amongst young people, the sector

and the community. It was suggested that quality should come hand in hand with a sense of “collective creativity” which is accessible to all involved.

2.3 Youth voice

Any programme developed for young people should ensure their voices are at the heart of the conversation. As noted above, over 34% of respondents to the initial survey were 25 and under, lending a strong youth perspective to the findings to date.

One respondent stated: *“There has to be the opportunity for the young people to play it the way they want to play it”*. Another folk musician commented: *“Repertoire should be what young people today in England think folk music is... Anything that will limit the young people is not good”*.

It was felt that teaching young folk musicians to play in a specific or identical style should be avoided, and that self-expression should be encouraged. It was also noted that the young people who are involved in the ensemble may go on to teach folk music themselves, highlighting the importance of keeping young leaders at the heart of developments.

2.4 Towards a vision for the ensemble

The roundtable group felt that the vision and outcomes of this project will grow organically as the idea develops and takes shape. It was suggested that a vision and ethos statement could be drafted in consultation with a core group of consultees as a next step. Suggestions of potential objectives or outcomes included:

- ◉ Raising the profile of folk music amongst young people
- ◉ Raising the profile of folk music amongst the wider community
- ◉ Raising the profile of folk music amongst the wider music education sector
- ◉ Providing more opportunities for young people to play folk music
- ◉ Enabling more high quality folk music experiences for young people.

2.5 Summary

- ◉ There are potential stigmas surrounding the terms ‘authentic’ and ‘authenticity’, and many felt that placing this in a contemporary context may be more helpful in ongoing discussions

- ◉ There was an ongoing discussion about how best to combine 'traditional' and 'contemporary' approaches that need further defining
- ◉ There was agreement that the experience for young people should be excellent and of the highest quality, but not elite, and that access to the experience should be as highly regarded as excellence
- ◉ Young people should have the opportunity to shape and develop the programme and their input should be valued
- ◉ A clear and simple vision and ethos statement should be drafted in the next stage of the consultation

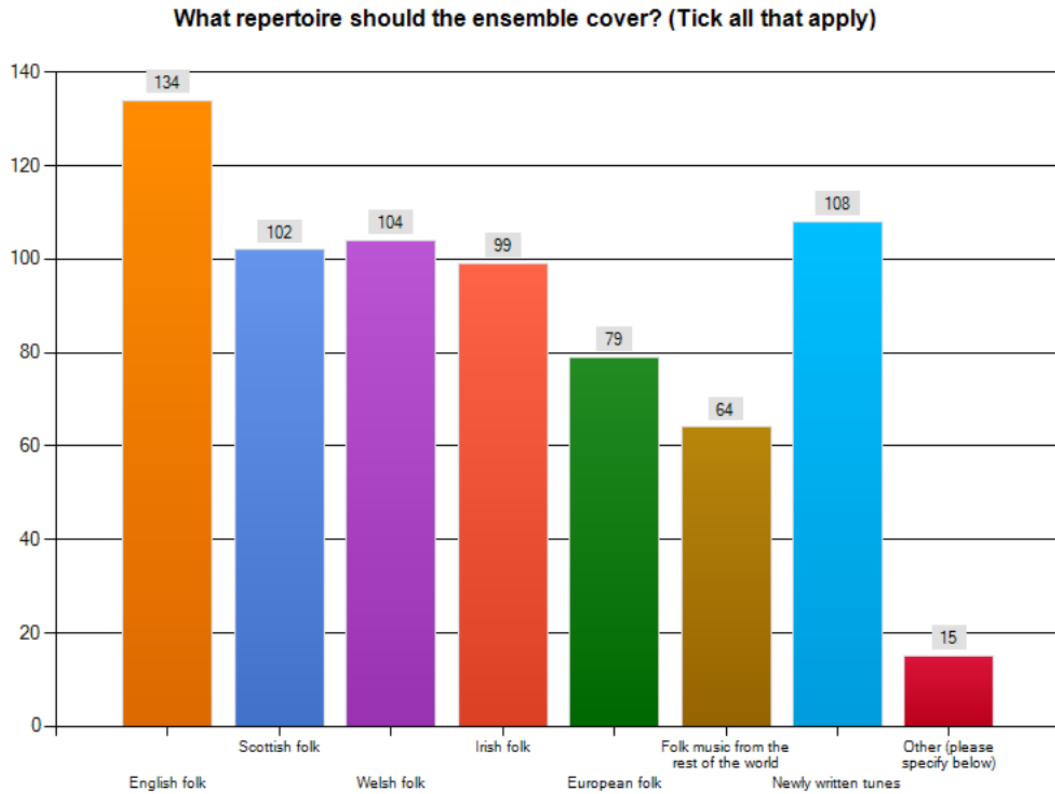


3. Content

The artistic content of the proposed ensemble’s programme was explored extensively through the survey, interviews and roundtable discussions.

3.1 Repertoire

The discussion around repertoire elicited a wide range of responses and perspectives. As can be seen, English folk music received the highest number of responses, whilst Scottish, Welsh and Irish also proved popular. It is also interesting to note that ‘newly written tunes’ gathered the second highest response rate.



Many felt that English folk music should be at the heart of the ensemble, with influences from other cultures complementing this as appropriate. One respondent commented:

“I don't want to sound like I'm excluding other traditions, but to be honest, England is severely lacking in this area and it's about time we made a push on our own traditions. If I play an English tune to my pupils they immediately presume that it's Irish or Scottish, so I do think we need to create an English identity. It's very unlikely that you would find any of the other countries playing English tunes...”

It was noted that young people and audiences should not feel excluded from taking part in this project because they are not 'English'. Several respondents felt that the ensemble could be about introducing people to the folk music traditions of England, rather than 'English folk music'. One respondent commented: *“'English' sounds very loaded, 'England' sounds more geographical and less exclusive.”*

Another commented:

“If it didn't have the English tradition at its heart, it would be a missed opportunity to promote the English tradition as a valid, positive and relevant musical choice for all, not just young people. That isn't the same as saying never create new tunes or work with other musical traditions - work inter-culturally whenever it is valuable to the young musicians and when you can bring the English tradition to the collaborative 'table' with equal confidence.”

Regional traditions

Another key discussion point centred on England's rich panoply of regional folk music traditions. It was suggested that regional folk traditions could be shared and enjoyed across different regions. One respondent commented: *“I think [regional traditions] have been neglected, for example Northumbria is quite a long way from Southern England and the music is very different. We need to have an alternative. Also some English music (Essex, Kent, for example) is very neglected.”*

Other traditions

The discussion also explored the inter-relationship with other traditions of the British Isles (Scottish, Welsh, Irish) as well as international traditions. One respondent commented: *“English folk music is a priority, but also consideration given to England as it is today with recent immigration”*. Another stated: *“Please please look to Europe, they have some amazing traditions over there that we barely acknowledge. English folk per se is very insular in outlook ...if you look to Lorient Interceltique and any number of*

European festivals, there is a lot of room for Celtic music to be played, but English folk is in a minority. Surely more inclusivity should be vital to stop our tradition stagnating.”

Another commented: “I would like it to be relevant to people of different cultures as England is now such a melting pot of cultures. I am English, yet also Jewish and have lived and studied in Israel, France and India and therefore have many influences in my music which I enjoy sharing with my students, and they in return get a massive buzz out of learning and performing music of different cultures.”

Finally, some respondents thought that the question of tradition was secondary: *“We learn the most by expanding our horizons, all music is in some way related so the group should be open to any music that is possible for them to do something interesting with. If the working ethos is that of folk musicians then the music will naturally have that turn, so why worry about its provenance.”*

3.2 Instruments, song and dance

Instrumentation was a key consideration for respondents. A lively discussion was held about instruments, with the importance of fiddles, bagpipes, whistles, squeezeboxes and accordions all mentioned. Attendees called for a balance of instrumental ‘groups’ such as strings, brass, whistles and pipes. Questions raised were whether only ‘traditionally folk’ instruments should be used or whether there should be a more eclectic mix of acoustic and electric instruments. Many felt that there should be no limitations on instrumentation, though some felt that only ‘traditional’ or ‘folk-specific’ instruments should be used. One folk musician stated, *“Anything goes, although there is a better working mix – acoustic rather than electric.”* It was suggested that instrumentation be considered on an individual basis, taking into consideration the talents and aspirations of each young person and their instrument, whilst keeping in mind compatibility with other members of the ensemble.

It was also noted that folk is an aural tradition and so things should be learnt by ear, only using notation where necessary.

Over 71% of people in the survey felt that folk song/singing should also be completely included in this project, whilst 42% felt that folk dance should be completely included, and a further 49% felt that it should be partly included. Many responded that folk dance goes hand-in-hand with folk music and should naturally be included in the project anyway, although perhaps not until the ensemble has found its feet musically. One parent wrote:

“Of course, everything would be wonderful. Perhaps better to start with the idea of an instrumental group for secondary school pupils and develop as and when you can, or join up with other events i.e. dance groups”.

Another parent stated: *“It depends on the length of the programmes provided as to what should be offered. Singing provides good aural training for musicians, dancing could be included for the younger group – to encourage physical activity/ break up rehearsal sessions – but is likely to put off older musicians.”*

It was noted at the roundtable meeting that dancing and singing are a very successful component of Folkestra (Sage Gateshead’s youth folk ensemble). One respondent commented: *“Perhaps the ensemble can start as an instrumental ensemble and then singing and dancing can be introduced as the repertoire lends itself to it.”* Another stated: *“Singing and dancing could be a part of it, but it should be primarily instrumental.”* And another said: *“We are talking about the tradition, not an area of the tradition – it’s all part and parcel so singing and dancing should be part of it.”*

3.3 Commissioning and devising

Devising new work for a national ensemble is an idea already put into action by other National Youth Music Organisations, including the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain and National Youth Orchestra, who run young composer schemes and regularly commission new work. However there are certain issues relating specifically to folk music as an aural tradition which need to be considered.

The idea of commissioning and writing new works for this ensemble received a mixed response. When asked if the group should commission and/or devise new work, 89% of survey respondents answered that it should. Many also stated, however, that it should not take priority over existing works. One folk musician explained: *“There is a place for commissioning and devising but where is the ownership? The ensemble should be a facilitator, rather than composers being creative dictators.”* Another stated: *“Commissioning new music shouldn't detract from the musicians and the ensemble itself.”* However, another respondent commented:

“Young people should be encouraged to compose their own tunes as individuals and in a group. From my experience they develop arrangements more spontaneously when some of the music is their own. Encouraging young people to write tunes based on existing traditional patterns is essential in developing their understanding of the style and their musical curiosity.”

Others were more opposed to the idea with one stating: *“Newly written tunes are NOT folk music!”* This was largely counteracted by a majority of respondents who were in favour: *“The participants should have the opportunity to write their own folk music and songs. Folk music shouldn't just be a preservation of the past.”*

3.4 Summary

- ◉ English folk music must be at the heart of this programme, with influences from other cultures complementing this as appropriate
- ◉ The ensemble could be about introducing people to folk music traditions in England, rather than 'English folk music'.
- ◉ There should be opportunities to share regional folk traditions across the programme
- ◉ The programme would benefit enormously from having a relationship with other traditions of the British Isles (Scottish, Welsh, Irish), as well as European traditions
- ◉ It was broadly agreed that the ensemble should be as inclusive as possible in terms of instrumentation
- ◉ Both song and dance should be included as elements of the programme
- ◉ Further discussion is needed around the commissioning and devising of new work, and how this sits alongside existing repertoire



4. Structure

Having discussed a broad range of themes and considerations, the roundtable also explored possible models and structures for the ensemble, and discussed practical issues such as age range and ensemble size.

4.1 Existing Models

At the roundtable discussion, EFDSS Education Director, Rachel Elliott, presented background research on existing models of some current national youth music organisations (NYMOs) in England.

Rachel highlighted commonality of the various NYMOs' approach to recruiting participants via annual auditions (sometimes described as 'experience' days) held in locations across England/UK, and to working during the school holidays for intensive residential courses. She also drew attention to the diversity in terms of numbers young musicians involved, structures (e.g. different age groupings, opportunities for progression at different ages), geographical remit (e.g. England or UK-wide), artistic leadership (e.g. ongoing artistic director or annual guest), and additional projects and services.

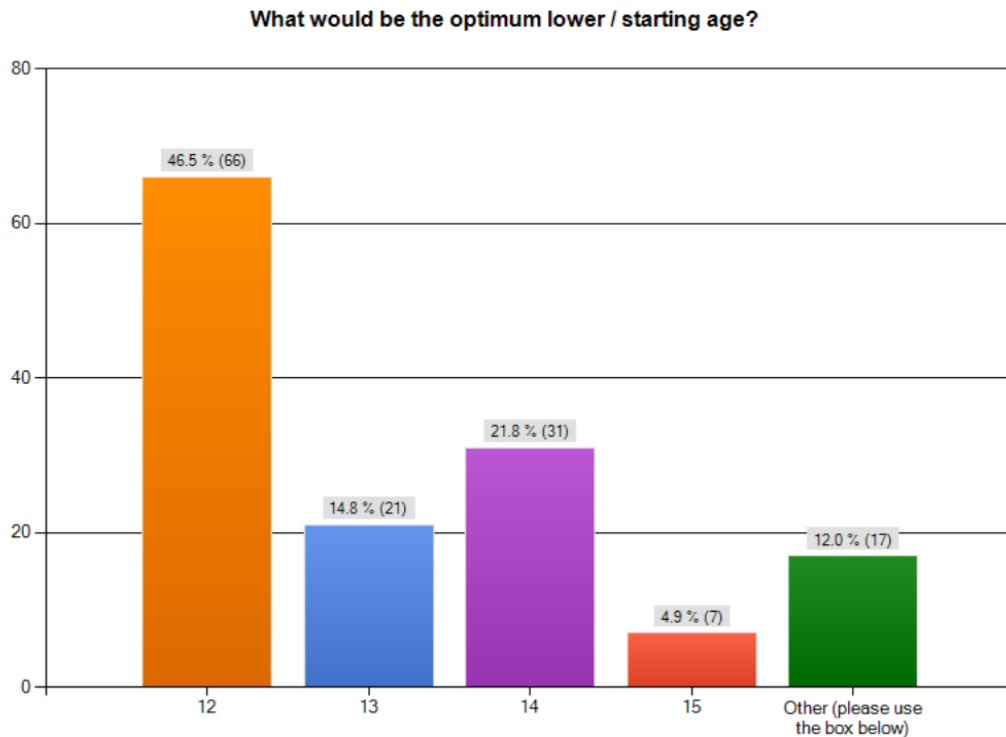
She pointed out that it was interesting to note that two of them had recently been involved in folk projects: the National Youth Orchestra's *Folk Explosion!* series of concerts in 2012, and the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain which is currently half way through a four-year folk song project 2012 – 2015)

Contexts and environments in which young people are currently playing folk music were further discussed including family-based music-making, folk clubs / sessions in pubs, via music organisations (venues, community music, volunteer-led), school-based bands (mostly extra-curricular and rarely in curriculum time), folk festivals, holiday courses and a small but growing number of ceilidh bands / ensembles run by music education hubs.

4.2 Age range

When asked '*what would be the optimum lower/starting age*', over 47% of respondents thought that 12 should be the youngest end of the spectrum. The remaining 42% believe that the lowest optimum age should be 13-15. A further 12% answered with 'other', and it is here that responses diverge. Many commented that the ensemble

should also be available to members aged 11 or less, with some saying that there should be no lower age restrictions at all.

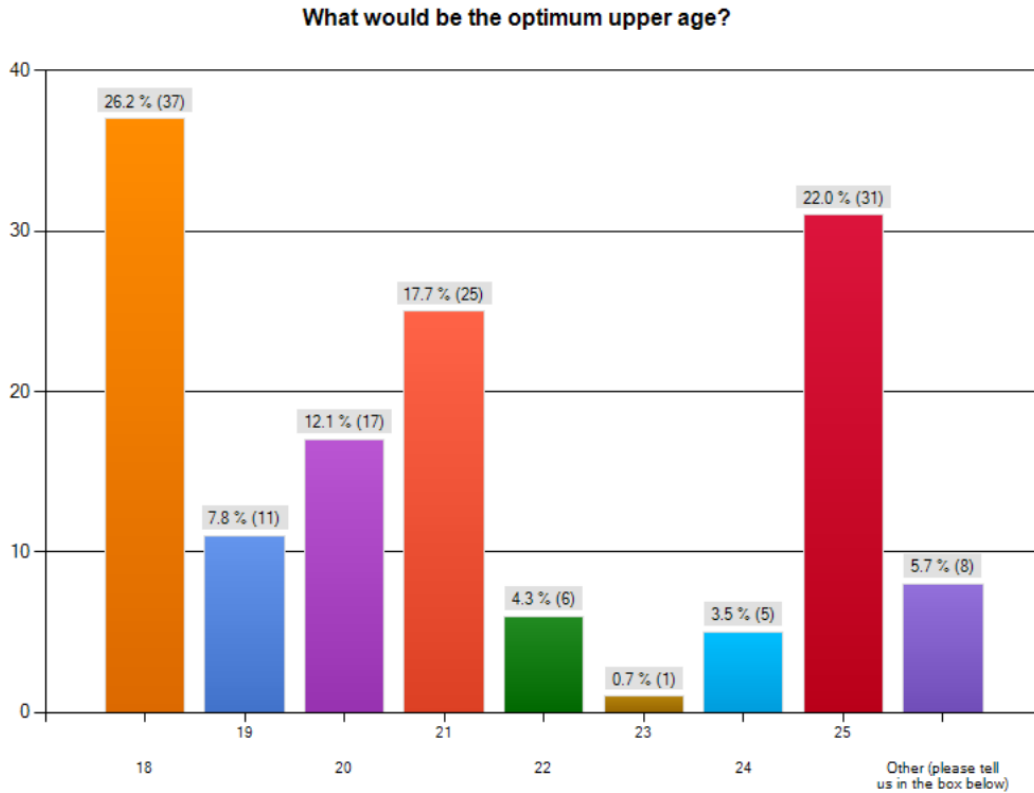


One participant commented: *“Many young musicians below the age of 12 show such potential and such skill that to not offer the opportunities to them would mean that they may ‘miss the boat’ or get encouraged by teachers/parents to join more conventional youth orchestras in the meantime.”*

Others felt that below 12 was possibly too young; *“Maybe slightly younger than 12 might be worth considering e.g. 9 or 10 but only in cases where children would be able to cope in a national ensemble context.”* One respondent noted that *“lower age-range comes down to safeguarding”*. Issues were raised concerning younger children accessing different locations across the country and being emotionally able to take on such a project. It was suggested that the location could move between different regions. It was generally believed that young children should be considered on an individual basis, through an auditioned process based upon talent and maturity rather than age and a graded requirement.

There were similarly mixed views when considering an upper age limit: the largest number (26%) felt that 18 should be the maximum age. This was seen to align with major public funding streams and to mark the point at which many young musicians embark upon new musical journeys at university or beyond. However, the survey also

shows that 68% thought that the optimum upper age should be somewhere between 19 and 25.



Some felt that there would be too large an age gap between 12 and 25 year olds, and many felt that different age ranges playing together might 'hold back' more experienced musicians, as well as older musicians overwhelming younger, less experienced players. However, it was also acknowledged that it could not be taken for granted that talent comes with age. It was also noted that folk musicians could not be rated in terms of the grades that they had achieved, as may be appropriate in other national ensembles. One respondent commented: *"Should age ranges be used more as 'guidance' than rules – does it take away from the origins of the art form?"*

Some suggested there should be a mentoring scheme for older ensemble members rather than an age bracket: *"No limits I reckon; older ones could be involved in helping younger ones"* or *"25 with a mentoring and youth leaders scheme"*. It was suggested that if older members became mentors and helped with the teaching process, this would help create a distinction between age groups and maturity levels, as well as creating work experience opportunities for young adults wanting to go into music leading or teaching. It was also noted that there could be less intensely paced activities for 16-18 year olds who are undertaking GCSEs and A Levels. One panellist said, *"Target*

younger players to begin with who will then grow up to organically become these older players; a key cohort recruited in the first place to become the core”.

Over 83% of respondents felt that there should be a younger feeder group as well as the main ensemble, in order to get more children involved in folk music from a younger age. Opinion on what the age range for this should be varied from 8-11 (43%) to 11-13 (34%). Some commented that there should be an even younger group, though most stated that when considering younger children for a folk music ensemble, it should be based upon ability. One survey respondent wrote, *“It is very difficult to define age ranges in folk music as young players have different levels of experience and motivation. Young people should be considered on an individual basis.”*

One issue raised was the risk of stunting the individual creativity of young children by teaching them all together in the same way at such a young age: *“Make sure they don't turn into robots that play in exactly the same way with no individuality and no depth to what they're playing.”* It was suggested that there could be an overlap between feeder groups and the national group, meaning that players could be selected to join the national group whilst still playing for feeder groups.

4.3 Size of ensemble

Opinions on the size of the ensemble varied widely. Over 60% thought that the optimum number of players for the ensemble should be between 15-30. Some 22% of participants thought that the ensemble should have more than 35 members, with one respondent commenting: *“As many as possible! 40 is elitist and small. This will grab no attention. If it is simply another tiny group under its own agenda. Community programmes are for the whole community, not 40 children spread across England, Scotland and Wales.”*

Others commented that location and funding would need to be taken into consideration when making a decision. It was also questioned whether enough repertoire exists for large folk groups. Others were more concerned with the quality of the output, commenting that a smaller group may create a higher standard. Many support the idea of a large number of musicians and age ranges being involved, sub-divided into smaller, age and ability appropriate groups.

One respondent commented, *“If we're looking for a diverse range of people then surely it should be about reaching as many people as possible.”* Another said: *“Folk music is best played in small groups. We should be preparing musicians for this and for them to hold their own.”* Others stated that the ensemble should be no bigger than 20-25 musicians, in order to maintain an individual musical voice. It was also felt, however, that the size of the ensemble should not limit its potential.

4.4 Regional models

Over 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a national youth folk music ensemble would complement existing youth folk music projects and groups. One commented: *“The most talented participants in regional groups may see this as something to work towards.”* It was suggested that existing regional folk ensembles could act as feeder groups into a national ensemble and that where possible, feeder groups should be created in ‘cold spots’ of the country to promote access for all. It was agreed that an ongoing strong regional offer was crucial for those unable to travel to national meetings.

Summer schools were seen as an opportunity for the national ensemble. One respondent commented: *“Enhancing key regional projects is helping to raise the profile of folk music on a national basis so that if we all approach it in this way then this helps and supports everyone”*. Another respondent commented: *“Using this as an opportunity to look at cold spots and how you could use the band to excite work in cold spots can be used as a catalyst.”* And another said, *“Everyone’s sense of region is so strong – this is down to creative delivery. Events and courses moving around the regions gives a real sense of what English music is”*.

4.5 Other models of the British Isles

It was important to gain a wider national perspective on the establishment of a national youth folk music ensemble for England, and therefore telephone interviews were arranged with Fiona Dalgetty, Chief Executive of Fèis Rois in Scotland and Danny Kilbride, Director of trac, the folk development organisation for Wales.

The models of youth folk music in Scotland and Wales are very different, with neither country having a national youth folk music ensemble. Scotland has many types of folk ensembles with lots of different styles, for example fiddle orchestra. Fiona stated: *“Is there a place for one or are young people already getting opportunities through other avenues?”* Wales has other national engagement programmes for young people, but which are more about, and linked to, development of the Welsh language.

Both Fiona and Danny felt that it is important that a clear infrastructure was in place and that any initiative should start from the bottom and work upwards, rather than being imposed from the top down. The importance of ‘local’ ensembles were emphasised by both. Both also stated that it was important to get the full support of government and Arts Council England and that any ensemble should be part of a national plan for folk music. Danny also felt that there should be *‘a clear political and artistic vision that had an overarching constitution or governance that was clear to all stakeholders’*.

Fiona and Danny discussed the role and choice of repertoire in detail. It was felt that English folk music should be taken seriously as an artform, and that English music should be at the heart of the music-making but not solely. Danny also stated that he would be *'keen not to define what English music was as this limits it'*. Both felt that the repertoire should not be prescriptive and that alongside trusting the experience of the musical directors and leaders, young people should be able to bring and influence the musical direction of the ensemble. Fiona felt that *'young people's voice is the most important aspect'* and both were in agreement that there should be new and devised work and that *'it's a living thing'*.

Several recommendations were made by them:

- ◉ More detailed discussions should take place with both Fèis Rois and trac, exploring the different successful models and structures already in place
- ◉ EFDSS should have an initial conversation with Kevin Brennan, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Folk Arts Group
- ◉ EFDSS should also make contact with appropriate staff responsible for traditional music at Arts Council Northern Ireland (ACNI) and Arts Council Ireland.

4.6 Summary

- ◉ There is much to learn from existing models such as NYMOs which need exploring further
- ◉ There is a variety of views around age range, although most agreed that the core age group should be 12-18 years old with the establishment of a younger 'feeder' group and opportunities to support those transitioning into university or employment
- ◉ There is a variety of views around size of ensemble, with the majority suggesting 15-30 players (with a core group of around 20-25)
- ◉ Any national youth folk music ensemble needs to complement and build upon existing youth folk music projects and groups across England
- ◉ More detailed discussions should take place with key organisations in Scotland, Wales and Ireland to explore how they work with young people in traditional music

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a great deal of support in the folk music sector for the creation of a national youth folk music ensemble for England. It is felt that such an ensemble would help raise the profile of folk music amongst the wider education sector, young people and the wider community increasing high quality opportunities to perform and progress.

Discussion around the group's ethos and character is still in its early stages, but many ideas have emerged as to the possible direction and nature of the ensemble. It was felt that the ensemble should be as widely accessible as possible, without compromising on creating an excellent experience for all involved. It was felt that young people's voices should be at the heart of the conversation and development of the programme, and those consulted articulated the need for a vision or ethos statement to grow organically from the consultation process.

The consultation explored repertoire, particularly the different traditions that may inform the artistic output of the ensemble. Ideas of what is 'English' were contrasted with the idea of the music 'of England', and the voice of regional folk musics were also strongly advocated for. It was felt that the ensemble should embrace the diversity of modern England, within the wider context of music in the British Isles, Europe and beyond. Instrumentation, song and dance were all explored with a mix of perspectives including focusing solely on traditional 'folk specific' styles and the possibility of experimenting with the evolution of the genre. Commissioning and creating new work and interpretations was seen as an area of potential and opportunity for the ensemble.

When considering the possible structure of the ensemble, the group looked to existing national models in other genres, and considered age range, size and the possibility of regional feeder groups which tap into and promote existing activity up and down the country. Some initial comparisons were also made with music in Scotland and Wales which will inform future planning and potential collaborations.

In conclusion the three overarching recommendations are to:

- Produce a draft vision statement, which outlines the ethos, outcomes and ambitions of the ensemble, and begin to develop a range of models or scenarios for the ensemble, and explore potential avenues of funding.
- Broaden the consultation to the wider folk community, including further conversations with advocates across the British Isles.

- ◉ Ensure that young people are at the heart of all future consultation and development of their ensemble

In order to carry these through, further discussions are needed specifically around:

- ◉ How best to combine 'traditional' and 'contemporary' approaches, in terms of the ethos and how these approaches might be defined
- ◉ The concept of 'excellence' and how this could be achieved whilst maintaining access of opportunity
- ◉ Young people having the vital opportunity to shape and develop the programme, ensuring that their input is truly valued
- ◉ How English folk music must be at the heart of this programme, whilst complementing this repertoire and tradition with influences from other cultures
- ◉ How to maximise opportunities to share regional folk traditions within the programme
- ◉ How the programme can have meaningful relationships with other traditions of the British Isles, as well as European traditions
- ◉ The ensemble being as inclusive as possible, including in terms of instrumentation
- ◉ Both dance and song being included as elements of the programme
- ◉ The commissioning and devising of new work, and how this sits alongside existing repertoire
- ◉ What can be learnt from existing models such as NYMOs
- ◉ Age range, where there is a core age range of 12-18 year olds, with the establishment of younger feeder groups and opportunities created for older members to continue to engage in the programme
- ◉ Ensemble size, where there could be core group of 20 – 25 players which is able to be flexible in responding to various opportunities
- ◉ How this programme complements and builds on existing youth folk music projects and groups across England

Appendices

Appendix A Online questionnaire

Part A: Your details

1. Name of respondent
2. Age of respondent
3. Organisation (if applicable)
4. Role of respondent (tick list)
5. Email
6. Local Authority (tick list)
7. What is your involvement/ interest in youth folk music?

Part B. Outcomes

8. To what extent do you agree that a national youth folk ensemble would help raise the profile of folk music?

- Amongst the wider music education sector?
- Amongst young people?
- Amongst the wider community?

9. Opportunities and high quality experiences

To what extent do you agree that a national youth folk ensemble would:

- Contribute to more opportunities for young people to play folk music?
- Enable more high quality folk music experiences for young people?

Part C. Practical Considerations

10. What would be the optimum lower / starting age?

11. What would be the optimum upper age?

12. Should there be a younger feeder age-range as well?

13. If you think there should be a younger group, what age range should this be (tick all that apply)?

14. How many players would be the optimum number for the ensemble

15. To what extent should the following be included in the programme?

- Folk song/singing
- Folk dance

16. What repertoire should the ensemble cover?

- English folk
- Scottish folk
- Welsh folk
- Irish folk
- European folk
- Folk music from the rest of the world
- Newly written tunes
- other

17. Should the ensemble commission and/or devise new work?

18. To what extent do you agree that a national youth folk ensemble would complement existing youth folk music projects and groups?

19. Please describe any existing models within folk or other genres of music that could usefully inform the potential structure of a national ensemble.

20. Are there any other comments that you would like to make?

Appendix B

List of attendees roundtable consultation discussion

Monday 20 January 2014

Cecil Sharp House

Bella Hardy, folk artist and co-ordinator of Cambridge Folk Festival's youth programme

Cassie Tait, Education Manger (Youth Programmes), EFDSS

Cliff Woodworth, Musical Director, That's All Folk, Rochdale Music Service

Ed Milner, Head of Music Learning, Sage Gateshead

Gavin Davenport, Learning Officer (The Full English), EFDSS

Graeme Smith, Head of Croydon Music and Arts

Katy Spicer, Chief Executive, EFDSS

Laura Reid, Education Manager (Community Programmes), EFDSS

Laurel Swift, folk artist, educator and leader of EFDSS' London Youth Folk Ensemble

Liza Austin Strange, Director, Fosbrook Folk Education Trust, Stockport

Maia Ayling, Development Manager, Shooting Roots, Bristol

Marilyn Tucker, Artistic Director/CEO, Wren Music, Devon

Paul James, Chief Executive, Halsway Manor, Somerset

Rachel Elliott, Education Director, EFDSS

Ruth Wild, Director, Roots Alive, Artforms, Leeds

Graeme Surtees, Head of Learning and Participation, The Stables, Milton Keynes

Appendix C

List of telephone interviewees

Alistair Anderson, folk musician, educator and EFDSS Board member

Danny Kilbride, Director, trac

David Leverton, Director, National Youth Folklore Troupe of England

David Sutton Anderson, Head of Composition and Musicianship, Royal College of Music Junior Department

Fiona Dalgetty, Chief Executive, Fèis Rois

Geoff Harniess, Head of Saturday Centre & Holiday Courses, Centre for Young Musicians, London

Jim Moray, folk musician and EFDSS Board member (Doug Oates)

Joe Broughton, folk musician, educator and director of Birmingham Conservatoire Folk Ensemble

Kathryn Tickell, folk musician and Artistic Director of Folkestra

Sean Gregory, Director of Creative Learning, Barbican Guildhall Creative Learning

Will Lang, folk musician, educator and leader of Hot House youth folk programmes at Halsway Manor

This consultation was produced by Sound Connections for the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

Please contact us to discuss your consultation and advocacy needs: philip@sound-connections.org.uk

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