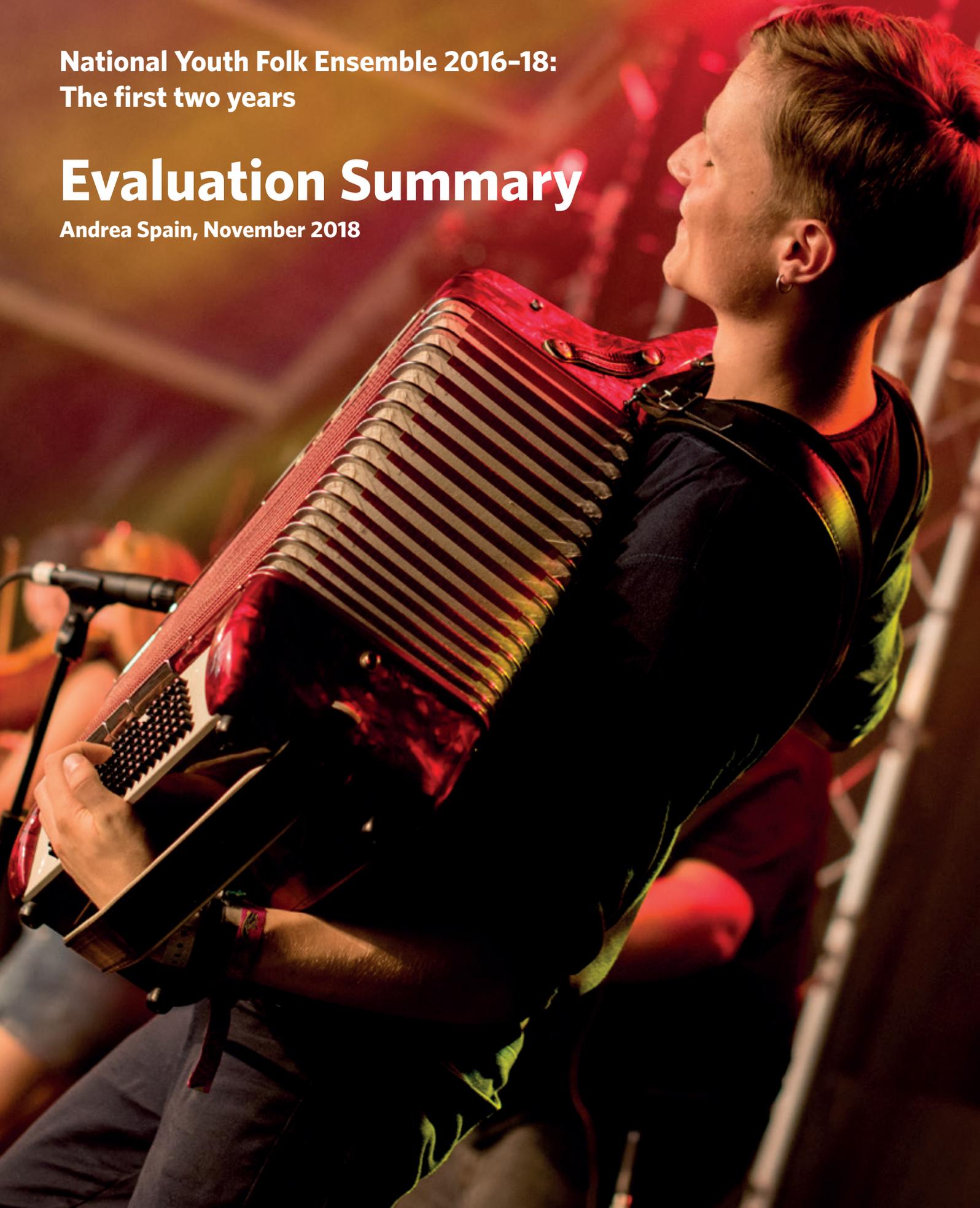




**National Youth Folk Ensemble 2016-18:
The first two years**

Evaluation Summary

Andrea Spain, November 2018



Contents

Introduction	4
About the National Youth Folk Ensemble	5
Key findings	9
Outcomes	13
Conclusion	21
Recommendations	22





Introduction

The National Youth Folk Ensemble was launched in 2016 by the English Folk Dance & Song Society (EFDSS) with support from Arts Council England. Its launch followed national consultation¹ which identified widespread support for a new national ensemble that would celebrate England's rich folk music heritage. Stakeholders from the folk and music education sectors hope that such an ensemble will raise the profile of folk music amongst young people, music educators and others whilst enriching the environment for grass roots folk music making and learning.

This report tells the story of the first two years of England's National Youth Folk Ensemble. It is the result of ongoing conversation and collaboration with young people, parents, artists, managers, audiences and wider stakeholders, including musicians and educators from the folk world and beyond. It draws on evidence from surveys, focus groups, observations and interviews, evaluating quality and impact and making recommendations for the future.

This summary report and the full evaluation report can be downloaded from efdss.org/youthfolk

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this evaluation.



"I'm really pleased to have a national ensemble available. The impact on the young musicians I know has been fantastic."

**SECTOR
STAKEHOLDER
SURVEY**

External Evaluator

Andrea Spain is a freelance consultant and evaluator. As a producer of festivals, performances, music education and community programmes, Andrea's career has focussed on creating musical opportunities for those who might not otherwise have access. From 2001 – 2016 she was Assistant Director of Music and Head of Learning & Participation at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance, where she led the Faculty of Music's work to widen participation in music education, including pre-HE programmes for young people, training for artists as leaders and teachers and the design of teaching of Higher Education programmes for musicians.

¹ Towards a National Youth Folk Music Ensemble, Sound Connections & English Folk Dance & Song Society, March 2014

About the National Youth Folk Ensemble

Key facts & figures

The National Youth Folk Ensemble

- Consists of up to 25 young musicians aged 14 to 18
- Is open to any instrument
- Has a significant focus on English traditional folk music, reflecting its regional variety
- Focuses mainly on instrumental music
- Meets for residential courses and performances 4 times a year, at varied locations across England

The Ensemble sets out to

- Celebrate excellence in youth folk music
- Nurture the talents, aspirations and creativity of young folk musicians
- Embrace contemporary interpretations of folk music, including newly devised and composed music that draws on the tradition
- Celebrate diversity and promote folk music as an inclusive genre
- Complement, build upon and help to link existing folk music education provision
- Inspire and develop the folk leaders, performers and educators of the future

In Years 1 and 2 of the National Youth Folk Ensemble (October 2016 to August 2018),

- **152 young people** applied to join the Ensemble & took part in Sampler Days
- **16 Sampler Days** were held in **15 towns/cities**
- **23 individual young people** have been members of the Ensemble from **8 out of 9 English Regions**
- The Ensemble
 - Gave 11 performances at venues and festivals in 8 English Regions
 - Performed to an estimated audience of 4,850
 - Broadcast live on BBC Radio 3's In Tune



“Working with the National Youth Folk Ensemble was a wonderful experience. The staff involved have an excellent balance of inspiration, generosity, passion, creativity and care both for the participants, other staff and the wider organisation. The participants were offered a really enriching learning experience, and whatever path they choose to take in the future, I know that [the Ensemble] will have helped them develop a very useful skillset. Also, hopefully, an extended musical family that they will keep in contact with and perhaps be supported by in some way for years to come.”

TUTOR FEEDBACK SURVEY

Meet the Ensemble

Ensemble members are active young musicians who play in ensembles and bands, take part in sessions, folk festivals and summer schools, record, busk, perform at folk clubs, and play at ceilidhs or in morris teams. Some focus solely on folk music – English and/or Irish - but most lead eclectic musical lives that include classical, jazz, rock music or music technology, for example. Some have a formal music education, while others have learnt in their family or folk community. Listening tastes are similarly broad, including rock, pop, hip hop, funk, indie, country, electronica, reggae, world music, jazz, classical and folk. Although the Ensemble welcomes all instruments, to date the Ensemble broadly reflects those instruments traditionally associated with British folk music – strings, flutes, guitar, squeezeboxes (melodeon, accordion) and pipes.

In terms of aspirations, all Ensemble members hope to be active folk musicians in 5 years' time, playing in bands or solo. Some are interested in teaching, leading youth groups or promoting folk music. Around half hope to be professional musicians but some specifically do not – their musical aspirations revolve around making music with others for enjoyment and as a social activity.



"I'm not exaggerating anything. It has been extraordinarily crazily amazing."

ENSEMBLE MEMBERS' END OF YEAR SURVEY



Profile 1 – Benammi Swift, Melodeon, from Derbyshire

What has been the best thing about being in the National Youth Folk Ensemble for you?

"The opportunity to have people with similar interests to draw from and work with under the supervision of professional musicians; and to create music that wasn't restricted by anything but our own imaginations."



Profile 2 – Ellen McGovern, Flute & Uilleann Pipes, from Lancashire

What made you want to join the National Youth Folk Ensemble?

"I was mainly interested that it taught a mix of tunes from all over as well as meeting more young musicians my age. Learning about the music industry was appealing as I always enjoyed both the playing and the organisation that went into a gig. After attending one of the Sampler Days with friends I was really excited. I had enjoyed the tunes we were taught, the way they got us to improvise around the tune and the overall sound we created."

Meet the team

National Youth Folk Ensemble Artistic Directors are appointed for a maximum tenure of 3 years, in order that the Ensemble benefits from diverse influences over time. Sam Sweeney has been appointed as Artistic Director of the National Youth Folk Ensemble 2016 – 2019, supported by core tutors Rob Harbron (English concertina), Miranda Rutter (viola and fiddle) and a wider team of guest tutors.

Programme Manager Sarah Jones is responsible for the development and delivery of the programme, working with Rachel Elliott, Education Director at EFDSS, who has oversight of the Ensemble as part of the EFDSS Education programme and national strategy. Further support and oversight are provided by Katy Spicer, Chief Executive and Artistic Director, EFDSS, reporting to the EFDSS Board. Pastoral care is led by Jack Healy, supported in 2016-18 by Natalie Reid, Martha Lloyd and Lucy Duff.

The Music Leaders for the first two years of the Ensemble were Sam Sweeney; Rob Harbron; Miranda Rutter; Andy Cutting; Becky Price; Ben Nicholls; Benji Kirkpatrick; Dave Gray; Emma Reid; Jack Rutter; Jenn Butterworth; Natalie Haas; Rachel Newton; Sam Partridge; Sarah Hayes; Saul Rose; Seth Tinsley; and guests Peter Wiegold and Hugh Lupton.

Demographic information

National Youth Folk Ensemble Members 2016 - 2018

- **Gender** - 61% female, 39% male
- **Age on joining the Ensemble** - 30% age 14, 26% age 15, 35% age 16, 9% age 17
- **Access Needs** - 34% of members have a disability, special education needs or social, emotional or mental health difficulties
- **Ethnicity** - All Ensemble members are white. 17% from White Irish or White Other backgrounds, all others are White British.

Regional Representation	Region of residence, Ensemble Members 2016-2018	Population: % of English 13-18 year olds resident in region
East Midlands	9%	9%
East of England	4%	11%
Greater London	9%	15%
North East	17%	5%
North West	17%	13%
South East	0%	17%
South West	4%	10%
West Midlands	4%	11%
Yorkshire & the Humber	35%	10%

Educational Background	Ensemble members 2016-2018	Population: % of young people aged 16 or under in the UK attending
State	78%	93%
Independent	9%	7%
Home	13%	<1%

Socio-economic Background

Index of multiple deprivation decile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
% of Ensemble members 2016-18	0	0	17%	9%	4%	13%	9%	9%	17%	17%



“

“[I’m] interested in how [the Ensemble] achieved such unselfish teamwork – with such outstanding musicians and composers it could have been easy for some participants to stand out more”

**SECTOR STAKEHOLDER
FEEDBACK AFTER CECIL
SHARP HOUSE
PERFORMANCES**

Key findings

Evidence of need

- 1.1.** The need for a National Youth Folk Ensemble is clearly articulated in the applications of the 152 young people who applied to the Ensemble in 2016 and 2017. Young people are finding and appreciating folk music through a range of routes – their families, communities, schools, music hubs, local ensembles, summer schools, festivals, workshops and courses. They value folk music for its heritage and traditions, its freedom and creativity and as a meeting of like-minded people.
- 1.2.** Where young people develop an interest in folk music, there is a demand for opportunities to access new influences and role models and to connect to a wider pool of peers with a similar passion for folk. The National Youth Folk Ensemble is providing young people with opportunities not available to them elsewhere. Such needs vary between regions, but include
- Learning English repertoire and traditions
 - Music making with others of similar age and ability/commitment
 - Playing/learning with other players of similar instruments
 - High quality, varied and instrument-specific tuition
 - Experience of a greater variety of instruments and influences
 - Creative opportunity to shape, arrange and perform own musical ideas
 - Consistency and intensity of folk music learning
- 1.3.** As well as offering progression within folk music learning, the National Youth Folk Ensemble contributes to the wider music education ecology. It does so by supporting the development of creative musicians with excellent aural learning, improvisation, collaboration and arranging skills, applicable across a range of musical styles and contexts. This skills development opportunity is recognised and valued by both young musicians, and some music educators, as ‘filling a gap’ that may be missing in a music education based on notated (classical) music.
- 1.4.** Through establishing the National Youth Folk Ensemble, EFDSS have deepened their understanding of wider needs in folk music education. These include
- Regional strengths/weaknesses in folk music learning opportunities evidenced by skills demonstrated at Sampler Days
 - Areas of need in developing specific folk music techniques amongst players applying to the Ensemble
 - Opportunities for young people of Irish or mixed Irish/English backgrounds to engage with English folk traditions (and vice versa)
 - Demand for professional learning opportunities amongst music educators and folk musicians interested in running their own folk music ensemble
 - The opportunity to promote folk music skills as being of value within a wider music education to schools and music education hubs



“I would like to say thank you for the most amazing opportunity to be taught by such wonderful musicians. I will never forget my experience in the Ensemble and I think it will most likely be one of the biggest highlights of my life!”

ENSEMBLE MEMBERS’ END OF YEAR SURVEY

Recruitment



- 2.1.** EFDSS have worked effectively with partners to signpost young people to the Ensemble and to address recruitment cold spots apparent in early applications. Most applicants are of intermediate (grade 5 to 7) or advanced (grade 8+) musical ability with prior experience of folk music, playing in a folk ensemble and learning by ear.
- 2.2.** Applicants enjoy Sampler Days, which are open to all interested young musicians, and value them as a learning opportunity, whether or not they are selected for final audition. 10% of applicants who were not invited to audition have reapplied on a subsequent occasion.
- 2.3.** The recruitment process is widely considered to be an appropriate, fair and transparent means of selecting young people to the Ensemble by participants. There is good evidence that the process is inclusive and accessible for young people with additional needs and those from a range of musical, educational and social backgrounds. Boy and girls do equally well in the selection process, as do players of different instruments. While recruitment is selective, and technical ability is a consideration, musicality, attitude and an ethos of non-competitive, collaborative music making is important in selection decisions.
- 2.4.** Young people from the North East and Yorkshire and the Humber regions of England are highly represented amongst applicants and do well in the selection process, as do young musicians from the North West. Applications from the East of England and East Midlands were low in 2016 and 2017 but have improved in 2018 as a result of targeted strategic partnerships. Young people from London and the South East apply to the Ensemble but do poorly in selection.
- 2.5.** Ethnically, the Ensemble is all white (White British and White Irish), as are tutors, and this is representative of the applicant pool. Lack of ethnic diversity in the Ensemble is a concern for some sector stakeholders and, based on experience in classical orchestral music, there is a risk that an all-white national ensemble will deter young people of other ethnic origins from seeing a place for themselves in folk music. This is a complex issue, which EFDSS are aware of and are committed to addressing through a range of strategies across education, artistic and workforce development programmes. The results of this evaluation suggest that showcasing approaches to cross-cultural collaboration and diversifying the applicant pool should remain a priority in the development of the National Youth Folk Ensemble going forward.
- 2.6.** Home educated young people are highly represented within the Ensemble. The proportion of young people in the Ensemble who attend independent schools is broadly in line with the wider UK population. This contrasts with some other higher level musical progression routes where independently educated young people are more highly represented.
- 2.7.** 43% of applicants are from the 30% least deprived neighbourhoods in the UK according to UK Multiple Indices of Deprivation (Deciles 8 to 10). 10% of applicants to the Ensemble are from the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods² (UKMID Deciles 1 to 3). These young people do well at audition, making up 15% of Ensemble members. A higher proportion of applicants come from areas that are the most deprived in terms of health and disability (24%), access to housing and services (33%) and living environment (40%).
- 2.8.** Some sector stakeholders feel that more should be done to attract young people who do not have

² Deciles 1 to 3, UK Multiple Indices of Deprivation

a prior interest in folk music and to engage less folk active schools and music education hubs. However, Sampler Days may not be the best means of achieving this. There is a compelling case for a wider National Youth Folk Ensemble Engagement Programme that would

- address recruitment cold spots
- strengthen quality of folk music learning in some regions
- increase engagement of young people with less prior interest in folk music
- celebrate cultural diversity within youth folk music in England.

2.9. Young people are offered places in the Ensemble for 1 year after which they may reapply. However, the process of reselection has proved to be stressful and disruptive for some Ensemble members. Members form intense emotional bonds and are distressed by the prospect of not continuing in the Ensemble while others do so. There is evidence that most members wish to stay in the Ensemble for two years, that they benefit from a second year in terms of their musical development and most are successful in reselection. EFDSS may therefore wish to consider offering places in the Ensemble for 2 years at a time, conditional on a contract of participation or other code of conduct.

Courses

3.1. National Youth Folk Ensemble residential courses combine a range of activities including whole ensemble creative sessions, small group activities, skills based workshops, 1 to 1 lessons, sectionals, social music making and non-musical activities. Members are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of these experiences and the balance of activities. 100% agree that courses are engaging and exciting.

3.2. The tutor team bring a clear ethos of democratic and collaborative music making to courses, with an associated 'skills agenda'. Courses are planned effectively, with input from tutors and pastoral staff, to support Ensemble members to develop a comprehensive musical toolkit, create their own music, stay healthy and perform to the best of their ability.

National Youth Folk Ensemble Skills Agenda			
Musical Skills	Groove & feel	Learning by ear	Toolkit of folk specific techniques
Ensemble Skills	Listening & responding to others	Verbal communication	Musical leadership
Individuality	Distinctive voice as a musician	Interpreting & arranging material	Performance skills
Personal	Ability to identify and work towards own learning goals	Openness and willingness to be influenced by others	Organisation, preparedness & self-care

3.3. Musical teaching and leadership are very high quality. Courses are accessible and inclusive of all Ensemble members who are supported to identify and work towards their own learning goals. Skills are simultaneously developed and applied through large ensemble music making. Individual progress is regularly monitored, and members can request feedback and next steps for learning after each course. 1 to 1 lessons provide further opportunities for individualised learning.

3.4. 100% of Ensemble members agree that the artistic leadership of the Ensemble has been excellent; they have been inspired by the professional musicians they have worked with, that the choice of repertoire has been excellent and that tutors have been skilled in helping them to develop and learn as a musician.

- 3.5.** Young people are given creative ownership of their own music making. They are involved in proposing and selecting repertoire (including their own compositions), improvising and arranging, appraising their own performance and making critical judgements. This creative ownership stands out for Ensemble members as different from other musical experiences and is highly valued by them.
- 3.6.** Around half of Ensemble members would like more than the 1 individual lesson with course tutors offered each year, and/or more individual attention or focus on technique generally. While individual technical development may not be the primary remit of a national ensemble, members see the tutor team as a valuable resource. These young folk musicians may have more limited access to varied tuition locally than those learning in other genres.
- 3.7.** Ensemble members are encouraged to develop their leadership skills and ability to communicate musical ideas. This is an area in which many members lack confidence and techniques like the ‘beehive’ – small huddles in which to form and share ideas – have been introduced to help those who find it less easy to contribute. Unsupervised small group tasks are already included in courses but there is scope to further develop opportunities for self-directed learning as a means of building leadership and communication skills amongst Ensemble members.
- 3.8.** Courses have included sessions on teaching skills and in 2018 the Ensemble were supported to lead a workshop at Sidmouth Folk Week. This forms part of EFDSS’s work to develop new generations of folk music educators.
- 3.9.** Tutors and pastoral care teams take a proactive approach to promoting physical and emotional wellbeing during courses. Physical warm ups and other self-care techniques, including advice and guidance about acoustic health, are included in courses. 1 to 1 lessons address posture and technique where needed. Ensemble members are involved in conversations about rest, sleep and nutrition. Support for young musicians’ wellbeing is already very good but, in light of recent research evidencing high levels of mental illness in the music profession, EFDSS should continue to consider and develop the Ensemble’s approach to psychological wellbeing.
- 3.10.** Advice regarding careers and Higher Education opportunities is given during courses and members value the Ensemble as a source of relevant advice from industry professionals. A range of informal mentoring, work experience and showcasing opportunities have been made available to members and alumni. Some parents would like to see this careers support formalised and gain more knowledge and understanding for themselves. EFDSS hopes to develop a structured alumni programme in future.



“My interest in folk music was at risk of dying out. However, playing with such amazing professional musicians and working with such amazing new friends has brought folk music back to life for me. I would definitely recommend the Ensemble experience! English folk is now a new career option that I hadn’t previously considered.”

**ENSEMBLE MEMBERS’
END OF YEAR SURVEY**



“I can honestly say that the Ensemble has been the best thing I have ever done, and the Sunday at Shrewsbury was probably the best day of my life so far. I cannot thank everyone involved enough.”

**ENSEMBLE MEMBERS’
END OF YEAR SURVEY**

Project management & pastoral care

- 4.1. Young people, parents and artists overwhelmingly agree that the quality of project management is exceptional. This is echoed by praise from stakeholders about EFDSS's approach to partnership building and collaboration. Tutors are well briefed and supported to work effectively with young people.
- 4.2. Ensemble members and parents receive the information they need. They find the commitment, timing of courses and costs reasonable and agree that the Ensemble is organised to be accessible to their needs. Young people, parents and tutors have regular opportunities to feedback and ask questions and their views are listened and responded to. The only less positive feedback received relates to the Year 1 reselection process. This has been addressed, and feedback improved in Year 2.
- 4.3. Ensemble members, parents and tutors agree that pastoral care and support is excellent. The dedicated pastoral team is highly organised and professional, working closely with project managers and tutors to take shared responsibility for young people's wellbeing. They provide structures and routines and young people are clear about the support available to them. Pastoral care staff work in partnership with parents and young people to identify and meet individual needs, as well as being observant of challenges that arise during courses.
- 4.4. A significant proportion of Ensemble members identify confidence and self-esteem as challenges for them during courses. Social aspects of life in the Ensemble are extremely important to members, and many identify the meeting of like-minded peers as one of the most important outcomes of taking part. This can lead to anxiety when managing endings and transitions between the Ensemble and everyday life. However, feedback from members and parents suggests that the highly supportive environment created during courses and the ethos of collaborative music making have resulted in significant growth in the confidence and self-esteem of many members, over time.



"Being a part of the NYFE 2016/17 has been the single most influential and inspirational experience of our child's life so far. From the moment we heard about the opportunity to apply we knew it would be special but not that it would surpass all of our expectations in so many ways. It has been life affirming and life shaping, and we can't thank the EFDSS, Sarah, Sam and all the tutors and pastoral staff enough."

PARENTS' END OF YEAR SURVEY

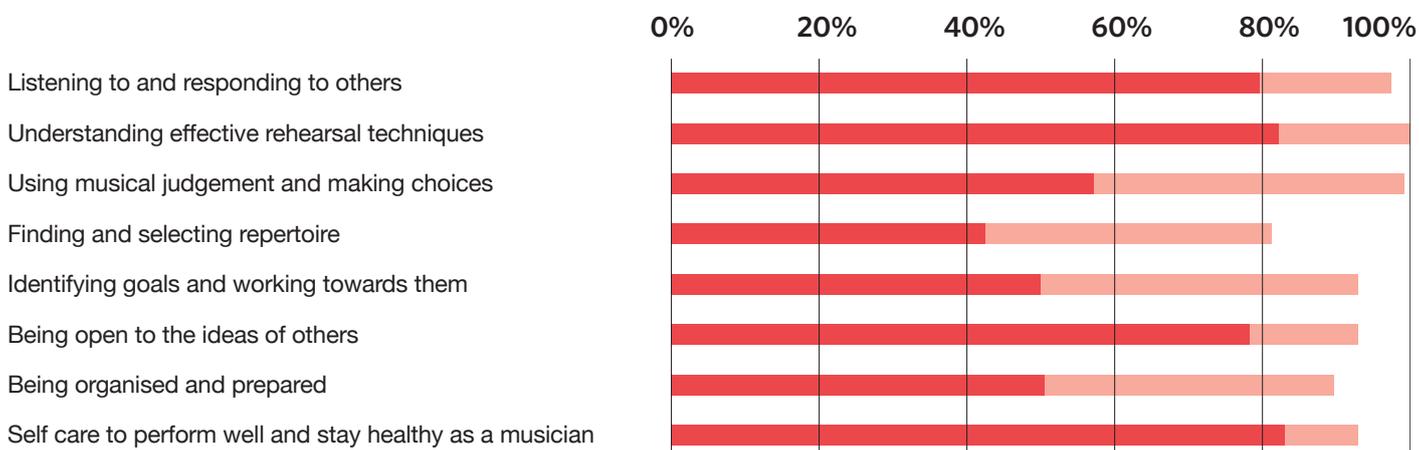
Outcomes

Performances

- 5.1. National Youth Folk Ensemble performances have been enthusiastically received by audiences. They are described as 'joyous' (sector stakeholders), 'groovy' (Ensemble members) and 'brilliant' (audiences) as well as 'excellent' and 'professional'. Audiences note the Ensemble's 'great communication' and the democratic nature of performances – that everyone shines.
- 5.2. 100% of Ensemble members agree that performances reflect their own ideas, skills and personalities and that they celebrate and respect folk traditions. Performances are presented by young people, with no tutors on stage. The influence of Sam Sweeney and his chosen tutor team can also be heard in the Ensemble's musical processes and style.
- 5.3. A significant number of audience members and sector stakeholders comment on the absence of song in the Ensemble's performances. Stakeholders broadly agree that song is not necessary in the Ensemble's performances, but they would like to see a role for it – particularly group singing – emerge over time.

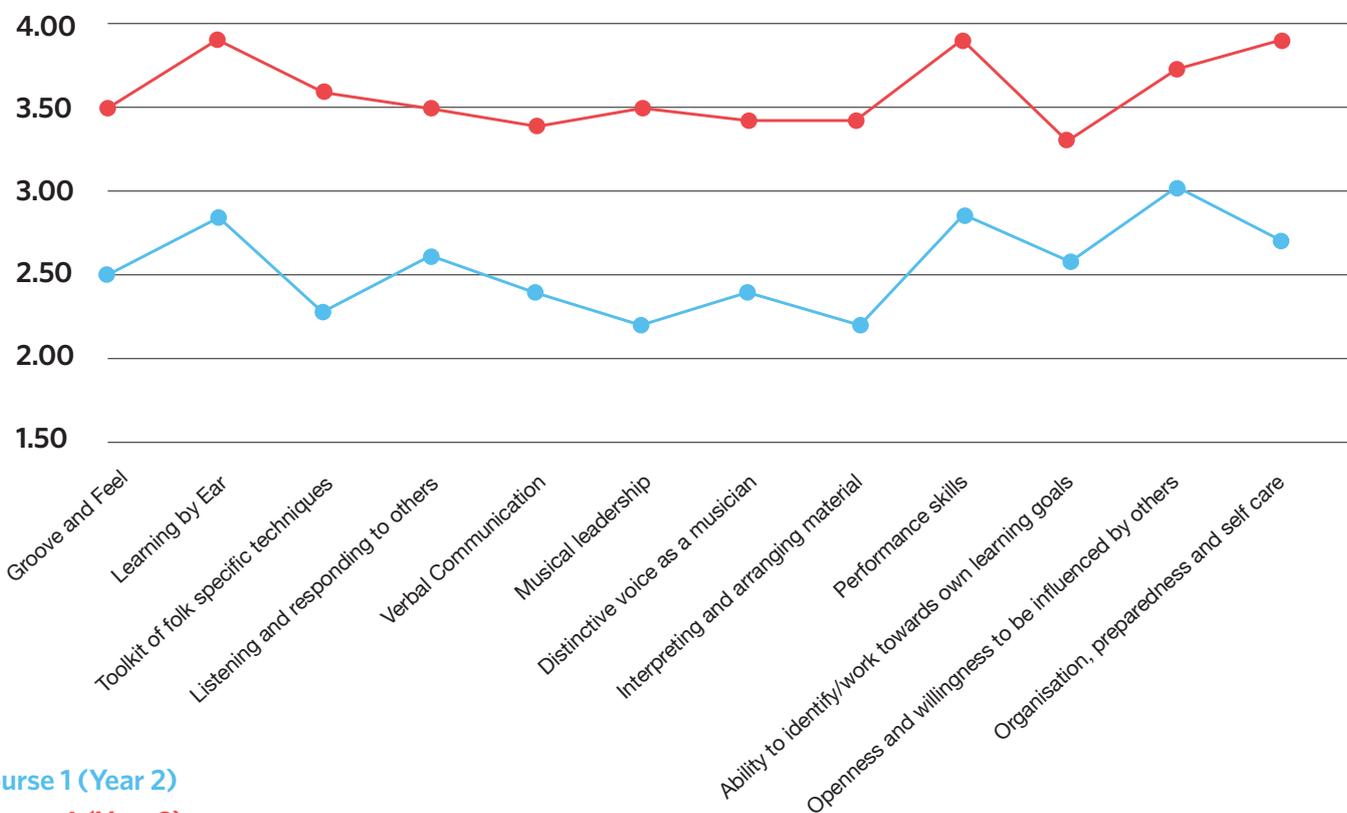
Musical skills & confidence

6.1. Ensemble members overwhelmingly agree that being in the Ensemble has had significant impact on their musical skills and confidence. This is supported by tutor observations that have seen members progress from demonstrating 'limited' or 'emerging' skills across the Skills Agenda framework, to 'established' and 'outstanding' skills by the end of their second year. Guest tutors have been struck by the high calibre of musicianship in the Ensemble, the sense of togetherness and the creative energy and confidence of members.



• Strongly agree • Somewhat agree

Figure 1 Has being in the Ensemble this year helped you develop any of the following skills or knowledge? Ensemble Member's End Point Surveys (Year 1 & 2 combined)



• Course 1 (Year 2)

• Course 4 (Year 2)

Figure 2 Average Scores for Musical Skills Observed by Tutors, where 1 = limited, 2 = emerging, 3 = established and 4 = outstanding



Right: Sam Sweeney, Artistic Director 2016-19

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“It has been a fantastic opportunity for our child, and we are extremely grateful to all of those involved. The expert tuition, the wonderful and totally reliable/professional pastoral care, and the friendship provided by all, have been quite extraordinary. NYFE has played, and continues to play, such an important part in our child’s life, and certainly not solely because of the consequent impressive development of his musical expertise.”

PARENTS’ END OF YEAR SURVEY

- 6.2.** 97% of sector stakeholders (e.g. music educators and leaders) who know an Ensemble member agree that they have become more confident and able musicians. All parents have seen some change (34%) or a significant change (66%) in their child's confidence in their musical ability.
- 6.3.** Ensemble members have found courses to have been most helpful in developing skills of creativity, collaboration or teamwork. In Year 1, improved sense of groove and ability to learn by ear are the most universally recognised areas of skills improvement. Through Year 2, before and after confidence surveys show that members became significantly more confident and able to express ideas in a group, lead or direct others and interpret and arrange repertoire.
- 6.4.** Although finding and selecting repertoire is included in courses, some Ensemble members would like more opportunities to develop skills in this area.
- 6.5.** There is good evidence that Ensemble members benefit from a second year in the Ensemble. In Year 1 they develop core skills but may be limited by under confidence. In Year 2, returning members report feeling more relaxed and able to take risks. They deepened learning by putting their Year 1 toolkit to use and gained confidence and skills from mentoring new members, as well as benefitting from more and different teaching.

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“I love NYFE so much, it's helped me improve musically so much and helped me become more of my own person too. Thank you so much. Hope it continues forever!”

**ENSEMBLE MEMBERS'
END OF YEAR SURVEY**

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“It's great to see an ensemble where young people had so much creative input...The individual identity of each performer came across without any sense of hierarchy within the band...it really felt like they were working collaboratively as an ensemble without any competitiveness. I think that other ensembles of other musical genres could take a lot from this approach”

**SECTOR
STAKEHOLDER
FEEDBACK AFTER
CECIL SHARP HOUSE
PERFORMANCES**

Motivation and aspiration

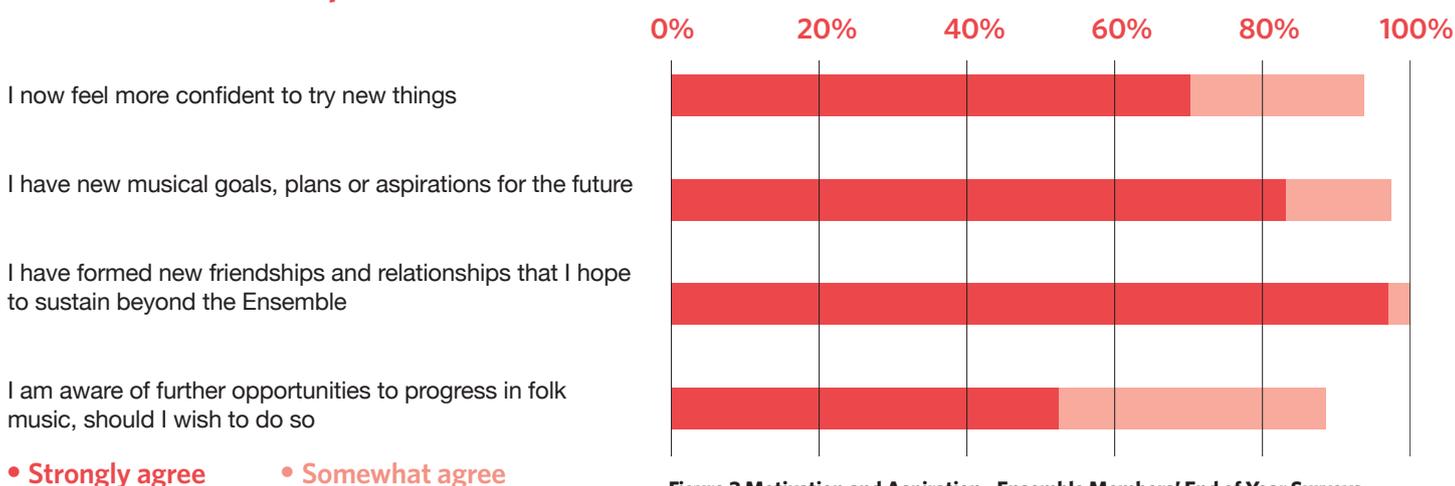


Figure 3 Motivation and Aspiration - Ensemble Members' End of Year Surveys (Years 1 & 2 combined)

- 7.1. 75% of parents have witnessed a significant positive impact on their child's motivation to practise and increased interest in or passion for folk music as a result of being in the Ensemble. 96% have witnessed some impact or a significant impact on their child's wider social skills or confidence and enhanced self-esteem. Ensemble members themselves feel more confident to try new things and have new musical goals or aspirations for the future as a result of their time in the Ensemble.
- 7.2. The forming of new peer networks of likeminded friends is a very important outcome for members and is also highly valued by parents. This has had significant impact on the motivations and aspirations of young people in a number of cases. However, in Year 1, both parents and young people highlight the negative impacts, at least in the short term, on motivation and self-esteem that arose from not being reselected to the Ensemble.
- 7.3. Before and after surveys in Year 2 show that more Ensemble members are interested in becoming professional musicians or studying music at Higher Education level by the end of the year. There is evidence that the isolation of some Ensemble members as young folk musicians, lack of confidence or limited access to a range of role models has previously limited the musical aspirations of some members. In feedback, a number say that the Ensemble has caused them to rethink their plans for the future and those who had previously ruled out pursuing music as a career now feel able to consider this as an option.

<i>Ensemble Members' Aspirations for the future</i>	'Maybe' or 'Yes' before Year 2	'Maybe' or 'Yes' after Year 2
Study music at a university or conservatoire	45%	71%
Become a professional musician	64%	86%
Become a professional folk musician	64%	86%



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“I wondered how the members each got into folk music in the first place...I don't have a background in folk music so I'd never really considered this before.”

**SECTOR STAKEHOLDER
FEEDBACK AFTER CECIL
SHARP HOUSE
PERFORMANCES**

Strategic value

- 8.1. Two years after its launch, the National Youth Folk Ensemble continues to be widely perceived as a positive addition to the folk music and music education sectors. Seeing folk music on the national stage is highly symbolic for many and offers new partnership opportunities, within and beyond the folk music world. Folk music educators see the Ensemble as a crucible from which future folk musicians, leaders and teachers will emerge while others value the prospect of those with folk skills progressing to further study or careers in the wider music industry.
- 8.2. Signposting from regional ensembles, teachers and other partner organisations has played an important role in recruiting to the Ensemble and sector stakeholders give positive feedback about EFDSS's approach to working in partnership. EFDSS have created a new directory of Folk Music Opportunities for young people, as a signposting tool for Sampler Day participants and now available to download more widely from the EFDSS website. The Ensemble appears, therefore, to be acting as a catalyst for the building of new folk music networks and collaborations.
- 8.3. National Youth Folk Ensemble performances have proved to be effective in promoting youth folk music. Festivals have seen Ensemble performances as a means to enhance youth engagement more widely through workshops, youth sessions and the increased presence of young people. EFDSS reports new demand for collaborations and support to develop folk music strategies from music education hubs.

Enabling folk music experiences for young people

- 9.1. The most significant outcome of the National Youth Folk Ensemble for stakeholders has been enabling more high quality folk music experiences. They see the Ensemble as filling a gap by providing high quality, higher level progression opportunities that parallel those available in other genres.
- 9.2. 152 young musicians attended Sampler Days in Years 1 & 2. In Year 3 (for which information is available), 43% chose to take part in Sampler Days as a learning opportunity without auditioning for the Ensemble. 91% of participants agree that they learnt something new at their Sampler Day. This suggests that Sampler Days are meeting a need for more and different folk learning opportunities.
- 9.3. There is good evidence that Ensemble members and young musicians who attend Sampler Days have shared skills and learning with other young musicians they know. 80% of tutors have been inspired to make changes in their work with young people elsewhere as a result of their involvement in the Ensemble. This suggests that the quality and variety of other folk music experiences may be enhanced by the dissemination of learning from the Ensemble.
- 9.4. A further 594 young people have accessed new folk music learning experiences through the National Youth Folk Ensemble Engagement Programme. These experiences range from one off workshops to extended performance projects. Following CPD associated with the Bury Youth Strings Folk Project with Bury Music Service, a local teacher has set up a new Greater Northern Folk Ensemble and a National Youth Folk Ensemble member has led some folk ensemble sessions whilst a student at Junior Royal Northern College of Music.

Raising the profile of folk music

- 10.1.** There is good evidence that National Youth Folk Ensemble performances have inspired music educators who have heard them to think more and think differently about youth folk music. However, some stakeholders feel that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the Ensemble amongst music educators in schools and music education hubs who are not folk specialists. This is a challenge due to the capacity of teachers and hub leaders to manage overwhelming volumes of correspondence and information coming to them from many different cultural organisations. Improving understanding of the pedagogical benefits of folk music learning and showcasing the skills of young folk musicians through performances and workshops may offer the most effective ways to win over hearts and minds.
- 10.2.** The extent to which the Ensemble raises the profile of folk music amongst young people is of critical importance to many sector stakeholders. Amongst those who know a young person who has attended a Sampler Day, 48% agree that participants appear more interested and motivated in folk music as a result. Of those who know an Ensemble member, 49% say that members have inspired other young people to be more interested in folk music. This suggests a localised, positive 'ripple effect' from the Ensemble.
- 10.3.** The fact that most National Youth Folk Ensemble performances have been given to knowledgeable audiences at folk venues and festivals is a concern for a number of stakeholders. They would like to see the Ensemble on a national stage – alongside other National Youth Music Organisations, at the BBC Proms or at non-folk specialist festivals – or performing with or for young people in schools or music hubs. They recognise the limited performance capacity of the Ensemble but feel that performances need to reach wider audiences if aspirations for the Ensemble to raise the profile of youth folk music are to be realised.

Professional learning

- 11.1.** The National Youth Folk Ensemble is a valuable professional learning environment - a community of practice in which folk artists and educators develop their approach to folk music pedagogy.
- 11.2.** 19 artists have been part of the tutor team between 2016 and 2018. 100% of those surveyed say they have been inspired creatively by the Ensemble, have gained new skills or knowledge and insight into new ways of working. 80% say they have been inspired to make changes to the way they work in other settings.
- 11.3.** 28 tutors have participated in National Youth Folk Ensemble CPD (continued professional development) days (2 days per year). This number includes 9 who are tutors from other EFDSS programmes or those of partner organisations, in order that learning is shared. This constitutes a significant investment in CPD for a workforce where many artists are self-taught as teachers and/or have limited access to CPD opportunities.
- 11.4.** A CPD Day on Running a Youth Folk Ensemble in Leeds in 2018 as part of the National Youth Folk Ensemble Engagement Programme was attended by 30 artists and educators from across the UK and will be repeated in Exeter in 2019 to meet further demand.
- 11.5.** Responses to performances at Cecil Sharp House suggest that they have inspired folk musicians and educators to try new approaches and 'be more ambitious' with their ensembles.

Conclusion

The National Youth Folk Ensemble is a musical learning environment of the highest quality. It has been devised, managed and delivered with integrity, passion, commitment and exceptional professionalism. This evaluation has found overwhelmingly strong evidence of the quality and impact of teaching and learning, artistic decision making, project management and pastoral care. Audiences are inspired by performances which have won over hearts and minds to the value of youth folk music.

The presence of a National Youth Folk Ensemble within the wider UK music education ecology is important. It validates not only the English traditions it presents, but also creative music making, and the musicianship associated with an aural tradition. The Ensemble fills a gap in progression opportunities for young people who may otherwise be isolated in their passion for folk music and may not pursue musical aspirations due to lack of confidence, opportunity or role models. It also provides a valuable professional learning environment in which to evolve folk music pedagogies.

The English Folk Dance and Song Society, with Sam Sweeney as Artistic Director, has created a National Youth Folk Ensemble that sits comfortably alongside the standards and musical excellence of other National Youth Music Organisations. They have done so while staying true to folk traditions and with an ethos of collaborative, democratic, creative music making in which the young musicians themselves take ownership. The result is an Ensemble whose performances focus less on individual virtuosity than on other, more subtle aspects of musicianship, like groove, ensemble and harmony.

Some folk musicians have felt that the selective nature of a national ensemble inherently contradicts with the inclusive nature of folk music. The National Youth Folk Ensemble is sensitive to this, selecting young musicians for their commitment to collaboration and learning. However, the reselection system for the National Youth Folk Ensemble has proved problematic, despite best intentions to maximise access for young people. Where large numbers of existing members wish to reapply, the competitive nature of reselection has the potential to be disruptive of the intense, interpersonal, creative connections

that are central to the Ensemble's music making, to cause anxiety and impact negatively on motivation and self-esteem.

Sector support for the National Youth Folk Ensemble recognises its potential to act as a catalyst for the wider development of opportunities and infrastructure in grass roots folk music for young people. There is early evidence that this is beginning to happen. However, more focus could be given to developing the role of Ensemble members as young advocates for folk going forward. Investment is needed to capitalise on emerging interest and increased demand from organisations seeking support to develop their folk music offer.

With increased national profile for youth folk music comes a spotlight on strengths and weaknesses in the folk music education sector. Applications to the Ensemble are indicative of the limited number and diversity of young people progressing to this level in folk music education. Arts Council England have recently introduced new requirements for music education hubs to report on the number of youth folk ensembles they deliver or support in their region. Returns for 2016-17³ report 509 folk ensembles, in comparison with 2,059 'world bands', 3,600 orchestras and 15,533 choirs.

Applications to the National Youth Folk Ensemble confirm a lack of ethnic diversity amongst young people progressing to this level in folk music education. An all-white ensemble could deter young people of mixed or minority ethnic origins from folk music. They also highlight the strength of folk music learning in the North of England in comparison with the extent and quality of folk music learning in the South, particularly the South East, which is also the region of England with the largest population of ethnic minority young people.

These issues are well recognised by EFDSS and the National Youth Folk Ensemble is one means of raising the profile of youth folk music in order to increase interest and access. It is important that the folk sector works collaboratively to address these issues, and that the Ensemble showcases creative approaches that ensure folk music is perceived as inclusive, valuable and relevant in 21st Century England.

³ https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/KeyDataOnMusicEducationHubs2017_0.pdf



Recommendations

- R1. EFDSS and its funders should seek to maintain and build on the success of the first two years of the National Youth Folk Ensemble, as a high quality learning environment that**
- Fulfils a need for progression opportunities amongst passionate young folk musicians
 - Provides continued professional development opportunities for folk music leaders and educators
 - Raises the profile of and stimulates demand for youth folk music making
 - Exemplifies the musical and ethical values of folk musicians
- R2. The already high quality of learning within courses may be further enhanced by**
- Increasing 1 to 1 lessons from one to two per Ensemble members per year
 - Increased opportunities for self-directed learning within courses
 - More frequent changes to the artistic direction of the Ensemble, in order that Ensemble members can draw on a wider range of creative inspiration
 - Further development of coping skills that support good long term mental health
- R3. EFDSS should consider offering young people a standard 2 year tenure in the Ensemble, dependent on their fulfilment of the Ensemble's code of conduct, in order to**
- Reduce stress and anxiety arising from the reselection process
 - Allow all members to benefit from a full 2-year learning cycle in which to reach their full potential
 - Re-allocate resources associated with the current reselection process
- R4. EFDSS should continue to invest in strategic projects and partnerships that address cold spots in regional recruitment and that engage those with limited prior access to folk music making opportunities.**
- R5. Contexts and modes of performance for the National Youth Folk Ensemble should be further developed in order to fulfil their potential to raise the profile of youth folk music amongst young people, music educators and the wider community. These might include**
- Performances on a national stage that reach audiences who are not already folk music enthusiasts e.g. BBC Proms, music festivals, performances alongside other National Youth Music Organisations



- b. Live streaming of performances to wider audiences
- c. Recorded online performances for schools and music education hubs as a means of introducing folk music to new learners
- d. Online workshops recorded/broadcast from courses to other venues and learners
- e. Media or online interviews/profiles that share the musical interests and journeys of Ensemble members

R6. EFDSS should seek to formalise an alumni offer for Ensemble leavers, that might include

- a. Advice and guidance for young musicians and parents about careers, further study and financial support available
- b. Mentoring for young people to set up their own projects and performances
- c. Work experience as music leaders, producers, project managers or in technical roles
- d. Musical reunions and peer support networks
- e. Online profiles that connect alumni to promoters and industry networks

R7. It is vital that the investment of time and resources that have gone into the successful establishment of the National Youth Folk Ensemble is now balanced by investment that capitalises upon resulting opportunities to enhance grass roots folk music making. This is likely to include

- a. CPD and expert support for schools, youth music organisations and music education hubs wishing to enhance their folk music provision
- b. Further strengthening of national networks that
 - i. improve signposting of young people to and between folk music opportunities
 - ii. ensure that grass roots organisations benefit from and have the capacity to respond to increased interest in youth folk music
- c. Strategic projects and programmes that strengthen folk music opportunities in the South East of England
- d. National debate and collaborative approaches that address lack of ethnic diversity amongst young people taking part in folk music

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