

Focus on Calling
Folk Education Development Evening
Online

Wednesday 25 June 2025

Presented by the English Folk Dance and Song Society's Folk Education Network
and Lisa Heywood's Callers' Chat project

Report by Chris Bevington



Photo: Lisa Heywood calling for a Queer ceilidh at Cecil Sharp House. © EFDSS, by Rosie Read Gold



I signed up for this folk dance education session mainly because I want to improve on what I am currently doing: looking for new ways to engage an audience, fresh dances and insights from other callers. I am trying to attend more of the caller meetings we have as a group in Cornwall; informal sessions of sharing and advice, but this was a wider group of people and looked to be very interesting.

Most importantly, the session was very relaxed, but continued at a good pace, so I can honestly say this is the first time I have sat in front of Zoom for two hours and remained engaged for the entire event. There were several different speakers, listed below, all with wide ranging knowledge and great insights.

The use of breakout rooms I found to be very helpful. With around 40 people in the Zoom call, it was difficult to engage with many of them, although the chat facility was well used. The break outs involved only four or five people in each group, were well timed and, each time, we had a theme or question to discuss, with a reminder to make sure everyone had a chance to speak. From these smaller groupings, I found people I shared lots in common with and much reassurance that I wasn't alone in my doubts and uncertainties. It has been really helpful to learn from the experiences of other callers and I have come away with a list of ideas and new dances.

It was fascinating to hear the journeys through folk dance etc made by the session leaders Rachel Elliott (Education Director, EFDSS), Jen Cox (Dance Development Manager) and Kerry Fletcher (Folk Education Network Co-ordinator) and inspiring to watch videos and hear ideas for extending my practice and not being afraid to borrow and learn from other forms like bhangra or street dance.

Lisa Heywood (folk dance caller), whose credentials are almost too numerous to mention here, led us through a really interesting session aimed at questioning our practice and sharing pitfalls and successes. Prompted by a simple PowerPoint, we were led to a deeper insight into what a ceilidh evening actually involved. So many simple ideas I had not contemplated before, such as ways to help people find someone to dance with and how to get an overview of the room, the audience and how my evening of calling might be organised to best allow everyone to feel engaged and have fun.

Jen Cox gave us a brief overview of the EFDSS website, which has encouraged me not only to join but to spend some time exploring the site and its many useful resources and events. The Folk Dance Calendar at <https://www.efdss.org/calendar-events> was introduced as a great way to publicise our events.

All in all, it was a hugely worthwhile event to attend and I will be keeping an eye out for future events at EFDSS to help me with my involvement in folk dance in all the forms I currently use.

If you are a caller of many years, or new to the job, you will have many good reasons to sign up for future online meetings and will come away inspired to do more. I'm hoping to attend something face to face as soon as I can and will be browsing the calendar on the EFDSS website keenly!

Many thanks to all the organisers and participants for a fabulous evening.



Chris Bevington (he/him)

One way or another, I've been involved with folk dance for around 35 years, performing and teaching. I fell into calling for ceilidhs because a friend volunteered us to play and I was at the front. The first few gigs felt very uncertain but I've gradually grown into it, especially as we mostly play for parties and gatherings where the dancers are largely inexperienced. The addition of morris sticks and a maypole has made us quite popular over time here in Cornwall and I signed up for this event because I wanted to meet some other callers and pick up some new dances and tips. Lately, I've also become the membership secretary for Open Morris, which has given me another insight and further connections to dancers countrywide. Mostly, at the moment, aside from calling I'm teaching dances to young pre-teens and taking them to events in the South West.

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