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Peterborough Sings!

*A survey of lower- and upper-voice
choirs in the United Kingdom*

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SPARC

Sheffield Performer &
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Preface

As a music education charity supporting both a traditional male (lower voice) choir and an upper voice choir, Peterborough Sings! has a vested interest in understanding and leading the development of the amateur equal voices sector.

In February 2023 Peterborough Male Voice Choir hosted their second Male Choir Conference in association with Making Music and the Association of British Choral Directors, which was attended by delegates representing over 13% of the UK sector. In June 2023 Peterborough Voices will host the inaugural Peterborough International Women's Choral Festival, which will be attended by 12 leading upper voice choirs from across the UK.

Commissioned by Peterborough Sings! to inform these events, this research – funded by Arts Council England, and carried out in partnership with the Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre at Sheffield University – seeks to provide a snapshot of the UK's amateur equal voice choir sector and to identify challenges and potential areas of development and investment as we move into the post-pandemic era.

Whilst the lack of historical data for upper voice choirs prevents analysis over time, the data available for lower voice choirs shows that the sector has shrunk by a third in the last decade, from approximately 450 choirs in 2012 to approximately 300 choirs in 2022. Whilst the closure of choirs was undoubtedly hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic, taken over this period the statistics suggest that lower voice choirs are closing at an average rate of 15 each year. This represents nothing short of an existential crisis for lower voice choirs.

This research also evidences long-standing observations that equal voice choirs are consistently failing to engage with a broad range of demographic groups including those under the age of 65, non-White British, and LGBTQ+ communities. It also identifies widespread bureaucracy and some significant deficiencies in the training and qualification of many music staff.

It is hoped that this research will serve a variety of purposes, including a call-to-action for those leaders and members who are passionate about the equal voice sector, and a framework within which individual choirs can assess their own performance and development. It also provides statistical evidence for use in funding applications, and a baseline for the focus and allocation of resources provided by festivals and national bodies. Findings regarding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – and in particular attitudes and approaches – evidence the need for education and development in these areas as a priority.

For the continued rate of closures of choirs to be stemmed, all choirs need to seriously consider how their activities can be made more relevant and inclusive: they need to address how they might become more representative of the increasingly diverse communities in which they operate. Additionally, a significant proportion of choirs need to address the quality of their provision and look at ways in which they can develop the skills of their music staff.

Equal voice choirs form an important feature of the cultural heritage of our country. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the renewal and refreshing of the sector to ensure that this valued and unique art form continues to contribute to – and to be representative of – our national identity for many generations to come.



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Executive summary

Based on the responses of 907 participants in mixed voice (XV) choirs, lower voice (LV) choirs, and upper voice (UV) choirs, Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre (SPARC) Consultancy with Peterborough Sings! found that:

Choir demographics

[S1] Past research has shown that recreational participation in a choir can have social, physical, and psychological benefits. Members of LV and UV choirs surveyed in this report agreed that the most common reason for joining a choir was **to enjoy singing with others**.

[S2] LV choirs were more likely than XV and UV choirs to comprise members **aged 60 and above**. XV and UV choirs were typically of a mixed age profile, or attracted specific populations such as students or young professionals.

[S3] Members of the XV, LV, and UV choirs represented were **predominantly White British**. Some XV and LV choirs were associated with the cultures of specific regions (e.g., Scotland, Wales, Cornwall). UV choirs were more likely to perceive that they reflected the ethnic diversity of their wider community.

[S4] The majority of members and directors of LV and UV choirs **identified as cisgender and heterosexual**. Although participants identifying as transgender, non-binary, homosexual, and bisexual were represented across choirs, some other participants doubted the relevance of issues of gender and sexuality to their choir's activities.

[S5] Among LV members, **age-related hearing impairment** was the most common disability. Among UV members, **long-term illness** was more prevalent than other disabilities, and members felt well-supported in a female-only space.

Education, confidence, and ambition

[S6] Most choir members had either **informal or formal musical training from their community, school, church, or private tuition**. UV members were more likely than LV members to have taken qualifications such as ABRSM, GCSE, or A-level exams.

[S7] Approximately **60% of LV and UV choir directors had studied music to degree level**. However, LV choir directors were significantly more likely than UV choir directors to have studied choral music direction at degree or diploma level.

[S8] In comparison to LV choir participants, UV choir participants were more likely to perceive themselves as highly skilled and as prioritising the development of their musical skills. Participants in both LV and UV choirs **valued the development of vocal skills over other musical skills** such as reading, listening, and performing.

[S9] Most members of both LV and UV choirs were **comfortable and confident with their musical skills**, although the majority would welcome further development of, first, their vocal skills, and second, their musical literacy.

Management and governance

[S10] Greatest costs for choirs were **fees for music directors and accompanists**, and **venues for rehearsals and performances**. Expenditure on these running costs was significantly higher for LV choirs than for UV choirs.

[S11] Choir membership typically cost **between £101 and £150 per annum** – but UV choirs were likely to charge more than LV choirs.

[S12] Choir committees of XV, LV, and UV choirs had similar functions – but **LV choir committees typically met more frequently than others**.

[S13] **LV choirs were more likely than UV choirs to employ a paid director** and accompanist. Nonetheless, directors received similar fees regardless of whether they were employed by LV or UV choirs.

[S14] LV and UV choir directors chose music for their choirs that they believed to be **crowd pleasing** and **an exciting choral challenge**. Many of their favourite pieces were by popular contemporary choral composers such as Eric Whitacre, Dan Forrest, and Sarah Quartel.

Concerts and competitions

[S15] **LV choirs typically performed more frequently** than XV and UV choirs, and ranked performance-related activities to be of greater importance.

[S16] **LV and UV choirs typically competed more frequently** than XV choirs, but had fewer opportunities to do so after the COVID-19 pandemic. Choir members had mixed opinions on the relative benefits and limitations of the musical, social, and logistical aspects of competing.

Perceived objectives

[S17] **LV choirs typically valued performance-related objectives most highly**, whereas UV choirs valued socio-musical objectives like wellbeing and enjoyment.

Perceived limitations before COVID-19

[S18] Participants from both LV and UV choirs were most concerned about the limitations posed by their **ageing memberships**. These limitations were also compounded by issues relating to member recruitment, commitment and attendance, musical ability and literacy, and repertoire and vocal parts.

Perceived limitations after COVID-19

[S19] Online formats used during the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to **increase social interaction** and sense of community when used creatively. However, for some choirs they **exacerbated divisions** and slowed down learning.

[S20] In the short term, most LV and UV choirs found the COVID-19 pandemic challenging musically, socially, and financially. In the long term, **choirs' existing issues of ageing membership may be exacerbated** by changing lifestyle choices, ongoing illness, and death.

Research questions

SPARC Consultancy at the University of Sheffield was commissioned by the charity *Peterborough Sings!* to undertake research addressing the following questions:

- [Q1]** How has the male voice choir landscape in the UK changed since the report by Davies (2012), and what new challenges face the sector as a result of COVID-19?
- [Q2]** What is the current picture of female voice choirs in the UK, including their membership, musical aims, and financial and governance practices?
- [Q3]** What are the challenges to both strands of choral activity in sustaining membership and increasing musical ambition?
- [Q4]** What recommendations and strategies can be made to support the diversity, sustainability, and development of the amateur choral sector in the UK?

In the following report, answers to these questions are highlighted using:

[S0] Yellow summary boxes

[R0] Green recommendations boxes

Male and female voice choirs in the UK

Singing in a choir as a recreational activity is popular among individuals of varying ages and backgrounds. Unlike some music-making activities, singing requires no previous experience or investment in musical instruments or teaching aids, and is therefore widely accessible. Nonetheless, it is also replete with potential social, physical, and psychological benefits (e.g., Moss et al., 2018; Pitts, 2020; Williams et al., 2018). Past research has demonstrated that singing may improve mood and relaxation (Beck et al., 2000), cognitive function (Pentikäinen et al., 2021), and social bonding (Jacob et al., 2011; Weinstein et al., 2016).

Nonetheless, some such research remains unsubstantiated (Clift, 2012), and singing in a choir can have negative impacts relating to social issues (such as relationships with a musical director or other singers) and aesthetic issues (such as musical preferences and performance pressures) (Bonshor, 2017; Kreutz & Brünger, 2012). Outcomes can also vary depending on whether participants are amateurs or professionals (Bailey & Davidson, 2005), or male or female (Sandgren, 2009). Furthermore, some of the positive effects of choral singing have been found to be similar to those experienced in other leisure activities such as knitting (Lamont & Ranaweera, 2020).

Previous research specifically investigating male and female voice choirs in the UK is limited. Although cathedral choirs have attracted a great deal of research (e.g., Barrett & Zhukov, 2022; Freer, 2016), the most detailed existing survey of amateur male voice choirs was carried out by Davies – himself a choral director – in 2012. His reflections on data collected from 478 traditional male voice choirs concluded that although ‘the UK has a few stunning male choirs led by professional, well paid, dedicated music teams [...] the majority, however, struggle with recruitment, learning, skill levels and sound production. Nevertheless appreciated by audiences, they do demonstrate problem areas when in concert or competition’ (Davies, 2012, n.p.). The present report aims to expand on Davies’ work by surveying male voice choirs across the UK one decade later, and comparing their practices to the significant number of female voice choirs across the country.

The timing of this report meant that the results were inevitably affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which from March 2020 restricted the activities of amateur music groups. Meeting together indoors was prohibited and singing was perceived to be a particularly high risk activity, due to the potential aerosol spread of the highly infectious coronavirus (PHE, 2020). For choir members who had previously gained much of their musical and social enjoyment from singing regularly with others, the social isolation of lockdown was exacerbated by the loss of weekly rehearsals, and the move to virtual singing – where it happened – was often felt to be a poor substitute for the excitement of working towards a live concert (Zhu & Pitts, 2021). The pandemic presented a challenge to the longer-term survival of amateur choirs, particularly those with older and more vulnerable members who might not return to rehearsals. Moreover, the disruption to routine meant that well-established habits and hobbies were open to re-evaluation, and attendance and participation rates have been slow to recover across the arts, as shown in research with audiences and cultural venues (Walmsley et al., 2022).

[S1] Past research has shown that recreational participation in a choir can have social, physical, and psychological benefits. Members of LV and UV choirs surveyed in this report agreed that the most common reason for joining a choir was to enjoy singing with others (*Figures 1 and 2*).

Data collection

To facilitate data collection, three surveys were designed in collaboration with *Peterborough Sings!* The surveys were tailored towards choir members, choir directors (sometimes known as Musical Directors – MDs), and members of choir committees, and presented questions in varied formats including free-text responses, Likert-type scales, and multiple-choice answers. Respondents began the survey by reading the participant information, and those who wished to participate

continued by giving their informed consent. All participants were informed that they were able to miss out questions or withdraw from the survey should they wish.

The online distribution of the surveys received responses from choir members ($n=587$), choir directors ($n=124$), and choir committee members ($n=218$). Data cleaning was then used to remove duplicate results, participants who withheld their consent, and participants who submitted incomplete or incorrect surveys.

Following data cleaning, a total of **907 responses** remained for analysis:

330 participants from 184¹ different mixed voice (XV)² choirs across the UK:

206 members;
48 directors; and
76 committee members.

334 participants from 114 different lower voice (LV) choirs across the UK:

205 members;
40 directors; and
88 committee members.

243 participants from 94 different upper voice (UV) choirs across the UK:

157 members;
38 directors; and
49 committee members.

Each response was allocated a code: XV, LV, or UV (mixed voice choir, lower voice choir, or upper voice choir); M, D, or C (member, director, or committee); and a response number. For example, LV/M001 represents a member of a lower voice choir, and UV/D001 a director of an upper voice choir. Broadly speaking, the report focuses on the findings for LV and UV choirs, with comparisons with XV choirs offered where this sheds light on the data collected.

Choir demographics

Choir committee members who responded to the survey were asked whether or not they had a **mission statement** or **inclusion policy** that determined the objectives and

¹ Numbers of individual choirs represented by the data are approximate, since not all participants specified the identity of their choir.

² In this report we use the terminology 'mixed voice', 'lower voice', and 'upper voice' choirs rather than male voice and female voice choirs. This is in line with research into the singing experiences of individuals with changing voices (e.g., Ashley, 2009; Freer, 2016) and transgender individuals (e.g., Palkki, 2020), which suggests that traditional gendered terminology may reinforce exclusionary, cisgendered, and heteronormative practices and attitudes.

membership of their choirs. LV choirs were more likely to have a mission statement than UV choirs: 52% of LV committee members – compared to 27% of UV committee members – said their mission or aims could be found in their constitution, on their website, or elsewhere.

In contrast, the majority of both LV and UV choirs had not published inclusion policies: 73% of LV and 77% of UV committee members said they did not have one, or did not know if they had. Only 27% of LV and 23% of UV committee members said they did have an inclusion policy, in their constitution ($n=17$), on their website ($n=9$), or elsewhere ($n=9$).

Size and rehearsals

The majority of respondents in LV ($n=247$) and UV ($n=186$) choirs indicated that their choirs had **between 15 and 45 regular members** (Table 1), and that they **rehearsed once a week** except during holidays such as Christmas and the summer season.

Table 1. Number of members in LV and UV choirs

	Number of choir members					
	4–15	16–30	31–45	46–60	61–75	75–90
Respondents in LV choirs (n)	9	115	132	54	13	8
Respondents in UV choirs (n)	18	78	108	27	8	1

Age

Across XV, LV, and UV choirs, **the modal age for choir members was 65 to 74**. However, LV and UV choirs also had high percentages of members aged 75 or over (LV: 32%; UV: 31%), whereas the majority of XV choir member respondents were aged between 50 and 74 (Chart 1). Notably, 16% of UV choir member respondents were aged under 34, in comparison to just 3% in XV choirs and 2% in LV choirs.³

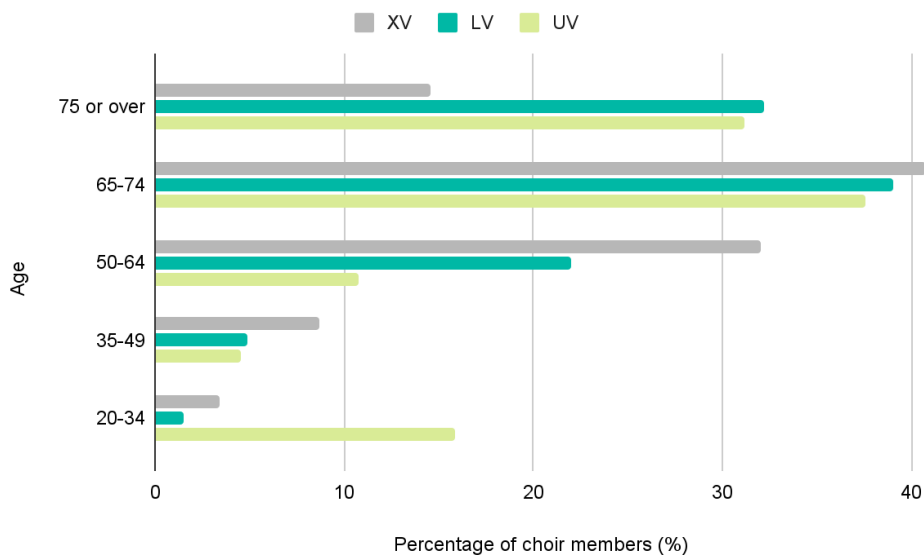
Similar trends were evident among choir directors. Across XV, LV, and UV choirs, **the modal age for choir directors was 50 to 64**. However, LV choirs had a notable number of directors aged 75 or over (XV: 2%; LV: 13%; UV: 5%), while UV choirs had a significant number of directors aged under 34 (XV: 27%; LV: 26%; UV: 35%).

The ages of choir members who completed the survey closely matched the wider age profile of their choirs. In XV choirs, 50% of directors and committee members said their choirs were of a mixed age profile ($n=62$), while 41% said their choirs mainly comprised over 60s ($n=51$). Responses from UV choirs were similar: 50% of directors and committee members said their choirs were of a mixed age profile

³ Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, and therefore may not always equal 100% where expected.

(n=43), while 34% said their choirs mainly comprised over 60s (n=29). In contrast, **77% of LV directors and committee members described their choirs as mainly over 60s (n=99)**. Only 16% described them as mixed ages (n=21), and 7% as working age (n=9), despite the fact that 71% said they were open to a mixed age group (n=91).

Chart 1. Distribution of choir members across age groups



[S2] LV choirs were more likely than XV and UV choirs to comprise members aged 60 and above. XV and UV choirs were typically of a mixed age profile, or attracted specific populations such as students or young professionals.

As shown in *Chart 2A*, **LV and UV members were also more likely than XV members to have been in their choir for more than five years**. This included members who had been in their choirs for 45 years (LV/M081) and 42 years (LV/M052). A similar trend was apparent among choir directors: the highest proportion of XV directors had been in their directorship position for between six and ten years; directors of LV and UV choirs were more likely to have been in position for over ten years (*Chart 2B*).

Chart 2A. Years of choir membership

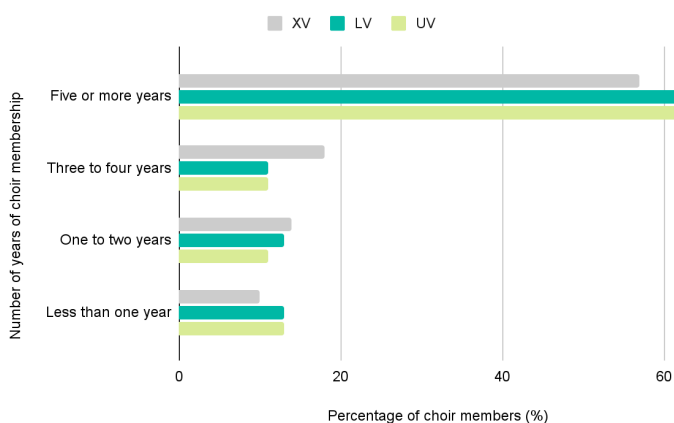
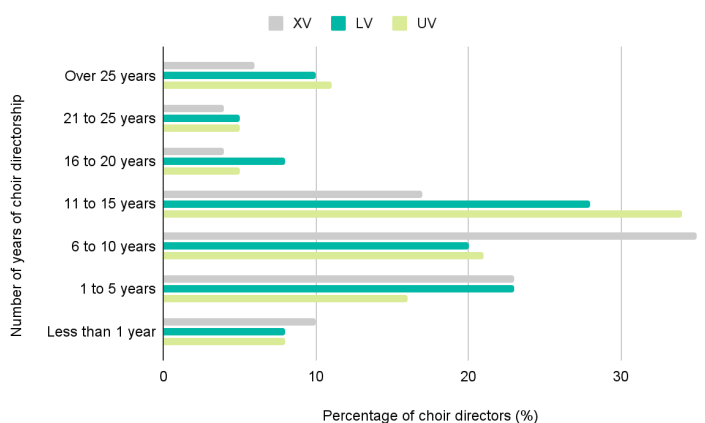


Chart 2B. Years of choir directorship



Ethnicity

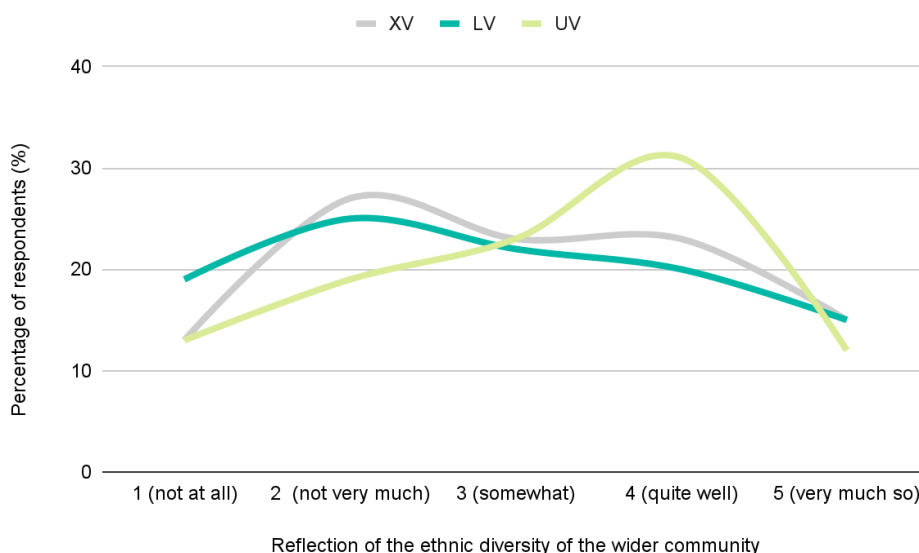
Survey responses from members of XV, LV, and UV choirs indicated a high proportion of White British participants. 91% of XV choir members identified as White British ($n=187$). Other ethnicities represented included Western European, American, Canadian, and Australian. **98% of LV choir members identified as White British** ($n=201$), and two identified as mixed race. **93% of UV choir members identified as White British** ($n=146$), and other ethnicities represented included White Irish, White non-British, Asian/Asian British, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, Western European, Eastern European, and Jewish. This can be compared to the most recent census data from England and Wales (ONS, 2022), in which 74% of the population identified as White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British.

Notably, some White British members of XV and LV choirs identified with one specific nation or region. Three members of XV Gaelic choirs – which promote the Gaelic language and traditional Highland musics – identified as White Scottish. Some members of LV choirs identified as Welsh ($n=3$), Cornish ($n=3$), or English ($n=1$), and were involved with associated regional choir traditions.

Respondents were also asked to judge how closely their choir reflected the ethnic diversity of their wider community. Those in more ethnically diverse UV choirs were more likely to believe their choir was a close reflection of their community's ethnic profile (*Chart 3*). Participants in XV and LV choirs were more likely to agree that their choir was 'not very much' like their community.

[S3] Members of the XV, LV, and UV choirs represented were predominantly White British. Some XV and LV choirs were associated with the cultures of specific regions (e.g., Scotland, Wales, Cornwall). UV choirs were more likely to perceive that they reflected the ethnic diversity of their wider community.

Chart 3. Perceived representation of the ethnic diversity of the wider community



Gender and sexuality

All choir members and directors were asked to specify their gender and sexual identity, if they were willing. Out of 205 LV choir members, **188 identified as cisgender male**. Others identified as cisgender female ($n=3$), transgender male ($n=2$), and non-binary ($n=1$).⁴ Some ($n=11$) selected 'prefer not to say', left the question blank, or wrote alternative comments, such as 'I don't recognise the terms in the question' (LV/M112). With regard to sexuality, **178 identified as heterosexual**, six as homosexual, and four as bisexual. Of the 36 LV choir directors who specified their gender, 23 identified as cisgender male and 13 as cisgender female. This implies that choirs with predominantly male memberships are more likely to have male directors. LV choir directors identified as heterosexual ($n=26$) or homosexual ($n=8$).

In UV choirs, **all choir members identified as cisgender female** ($n=150$) or selected 'prefer not to say', left the question blank, or wrote alternative comments ($n=7$). **The majority of choir members also identified as heterosexual** ($n=132$), but others identified as homosexual ($n=5$) and bisexual ($n=4$). Of the 35 UV choir directors who specified their gender, 28 identified as cisgender female and seven as cisgender male. This implies that choirs with predominantly female memberships are more likely to have female directors, but also that **men are less likely to direct a choir of the opposite gender**: while 36% of LV choirs were directed by women, only 20% of UV choirs were directed by men. UV choir directors identified either as heterosexual ($n=30$), homosexual ($n=3$), or bisexual ($n=1$).

Questions surrounding gender and sexuality provoked varied responses from some participants. Some choir members and directors specified a preference for the terms 'male' ($n=17$) or 'female' ($n=21$) rather than 'cisgender male' or 'cisgender female'. For some this arose from a misunderstanding of the terms, but others believed questions of gender and sexuality to be unnecessary or offensive: 'I sing in a ladies only choir but frankly is this question relevant?' (UV/M030); 'rubbish question' (LV/M045); 'sex is not assigned at birth but observed. I am not a cis woman but a woman. This question is offensive. Gender identity is unsubstantiated b*****' (UV/M148).

Nonetheless, for some members and directors of LV and UV choirs, their attitude towards gender and sexuality appeared to stem from a sense of inclusivity:

I don't care who joins my choir – I don't care what they like or are attracted to. If they want to work hard and sing well that's just fine by me. It's a question [th]at should [not] need asking. (LV/D032)

⁴ Unexpected responses within LV choirs – such as the appearance of cisgender female members – may have arisen for several reasons. They may be examples of mistaken data entry, but they could also represent older female members with lower vocal ranges, or female accompanists.

Others sang in choirs specifically catering for individuals of gender and sexual minorities,⁵ or had genuinely positive experiences of being ‘totally accepted by all’ in their groups (UV/M029).

[S4] The majority of members and directors of LV and UV choirs identified as cisgender and heterosexual. Although participants identifying as transgender, non-binary, homosexual, and bisexual were represented across choirs, some other participants doubted the relevance of issues of gender and sexuality.

[R1] Responses to this survey suggest that some choirs may experience conflict between members that identify as transgender, non-binary, homosexual, or bisexual, and members that are unwilling to engage with issues of gender and sexuality. This could cause exclusion or discrimination. It is therefore recommended that all LV and UV choirs publish an appropriate inclusion policy to ensure that their collective aims around equity and access are more visible than individual members’ biases. Where possible, this policy should be accessible to the public, online or through the choir’s usual means of communication.

Further advice, resources, and examples of policies are available from several organisations, including:

- ★ **Association of British Choral Directors:**
<https://www.abcd.org.uk/Resources/Choral-leader-resources>
- ★ **British Association of Barbershop Singers:**
<https://www.singbarbershop.com/diversity-and-inclusion-team>
- ★ **Ladies Association of British Barbershop Singers:**
<https://www.labbs.org.uk/diversity>

Disability

In LV choirs, the most prevalent disability among members was **deafness or hearing impairment** ($n=29$). This is most likely associated with gender and age: previous studies suggest that approximately 70% of over 70s experience hearing loss (RNID, 2022), and that it is almost twice as common among men as it is among women (NIDCD, 2022). Other reported disabilities included long standing illnesses or conditions (e.g., cancer, diabetes) ($n=19$), physical or mobility impairment ($n=14$), mental health conditions (e.g., depression) ($n=9$), specific learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia) ($n=6$), blindness or visual impairment ($n=3$), and social/communication impairment (e.g., autism) ($n=2$). Some members expressed gratitude for the inclusivity and patience offered by their choirs:

my disability just makes me more determined to succeed, it doesn’t get in the way of my choir attendance or ability. I thank my choir MD and other members for their patience. (LV/M012)

⁵ For example, Diversity Choir, London (XV) and the Actually Gay Men’s Chorus, Brighton (LV).

In UV choirs, hearing loss was less prevalent. **Long standing illnesses were most common** among members ($n=20$), followed by mental health conditions ($n=13$), physical or mobility impairment ($n=7$), specific learning difficulties ($n=5$), deafness or hearing impairment ($n=4$), and blindness or visual impairment ($n=1$). Some commented specifically on the support and understanding offered by their choir:

I have ME so I struggle with energy levels and can no longer sing with a choral society as I have done in the past. [My ladies' choir] is accepting of my limitations and very supportive. (UV/M022)

shortly after joining the group I had breast cancer. Being a female group there was a lot of understanding and support. Especially valuable as I had just moved to the area. (UV/M041)

Among LV and UV choir directors disability was less common, although some indicated having a mental health condition ($n=6$), a long standing illness ($n=3$), hearing impairment ($n=2$), or a specific learning difficulty ($n=1$).

[S5] Among LV members, age-related hearing impairment was the most common disability. Among UV members, long-term illness was more prevalent than other disabilities, and members felt well-supported in a female-only space.

[R2] The ageing population – and associated age-related health issues – of both LV and UV choirs was highlighted as a major concern to choir members, directors, and committees. Especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, some choirs lost elderly members to illness and death, but struggled to recruit new members of a younger age profile.

Difficulties in recruiting from a more diverse demographic may be related to some choirs' lack of engagement with issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Young people who are committed to tackling social inequity may be less likely to join an ageing choir in which members disregard issues of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or disability.

It is therefore recommended that LV and UV choirs address their understanding of EDI issues as a matter of utmost importance. As well as developing an inclusion policy, choir directors and committees should pursue EDI training and seek out examples of best practice from other choirs:

- ★ **I'M IN – The Inclusive Music Index** is an EDI self-analysis tool designed for music organisations by **Music Masters**. The Independent Route can be accessed by anyone, for free: <https://musicmasters.org.uk/im-in/>
- ★ members of organisations such as the **Musicians' Union**, **Independent Society of Musicians**, **Making Music**, and **Music Mark** can access EDI training and support online, and join nationwide networks of

under-represented musicians.

- ★ music education advocate **Nate Holder** writes a regular blog related to EDI, #DecoloniseMusicEd: <https://www.nateholdermusic.com/blog>
- ★ choirs such as **SHE Choir** explain their inclusive ethos in their online resources: <https://shechoir.com/>

[R3] Individual choirs' efforts to raise awareness of EDI should be supplemented by support from choral associations and networks. Organisations such as the Association of British Choral Directors, Sing for Pleasure, Making Music, and Peterborough Sings! should consider establishing accessible resource bases that cater to the needs of LV and UV choirs. EDI training should be tailored specifically to the membership of UV and LV choirs, who may have little existing awareness of EDI issues and the concerns they raise for younger generations.

Accessible resources tailored for UV and LV choirs could include:

- ★ basic **information sheets** on specific EDI issues.
- ★ short **online workshops** on EDI awareness.
- ★ frameworks or **policy templates** for developing inclusivity.
- ★ links to **websites** and organisations offering further resources or training.
- ★ live or pre-recorded **webinars** on topics such as ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and disability and how they impact participation in a choir.
- ★ online or in-person **networking sessions** for existing choir directors and committees to meet other diverse choirs and share best practice for EDI in member recruitment.

Education, confidence, and ambition

General education

Survey participants answered questions both about their general education and their specific music education. Members of LV and UV choirs had similar profiles of general education, with many holding undergraduate degrees (or equivalent) (LV: 38%; UV: 37%) or postgraduate degrees (or equivalent) (LV: 29%; UV: 36%). Others had formal educational qualifications up to the equivalent of GCSE or A-level, or qualifications such as those awarded by City and Guilds. **Choir directors were more likely to hold degrees than choir members.** 33% of LV choir directors and 42% of UV choir directors held undergraduate degrees as their highest level of attainment; 55% of LV choir directors and 47% of UV choir directors held postgraduate degrees as their highest level of attainment.

Music education

Chart 4 illustrates choir members' responses to the question, 'what is your singing background (if any)?' 18% of LV choir members ($n=36$) and 10% of UV choir members ($n=16$) said they had no previous singing experience. However, **the**

majority of participants had taken part in a school choir and/or a previous choir as an adult. Notably, a higher proportion of UV choir members than LV choir members had been involved in school choirs, perhaps because of a historic lack of singing opportunities for boys when their voices change (Ashley, 2013). On the other hand, LV choir members were more likely to have sung in church choirs – which traditionally offered more opportunities for boy choristers than for girl choristers (Welch & Howard, 2002) – and ‘other’ settings such as amateur operatic societies, rock bands, folk clubs, or pub singalongs.

Chart 4. Choir members’ previous singing experience

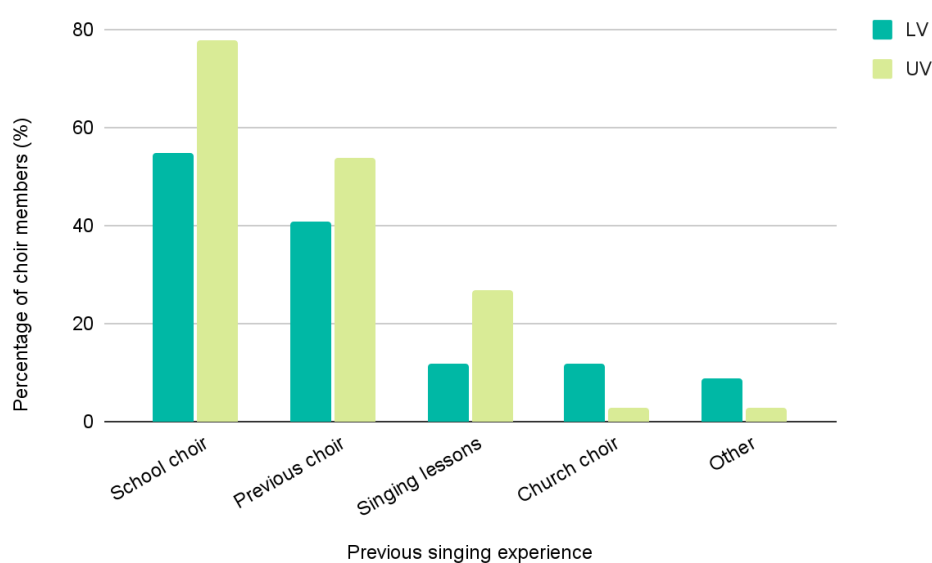
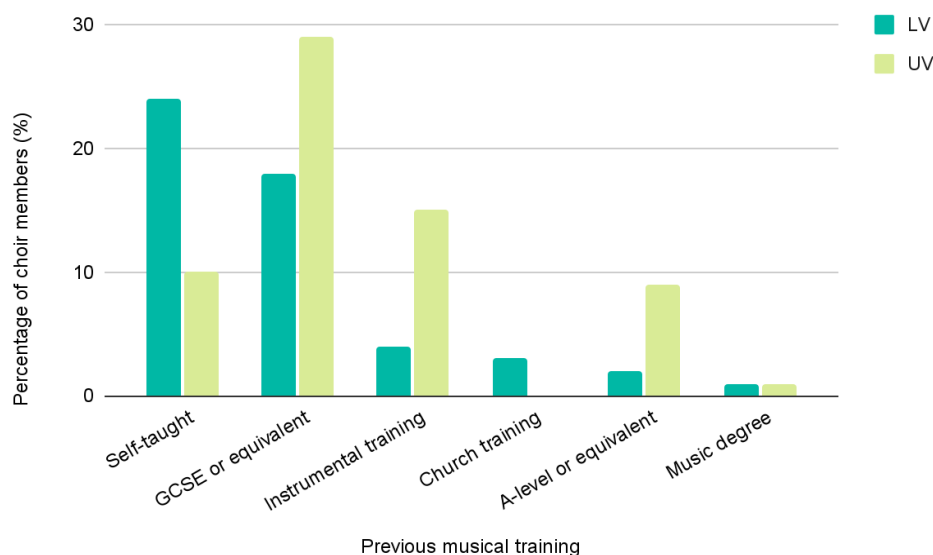


Chart 5 explores choir members’ responses to the question, ‘what was your musical training prior to joining the choir (if any)?’ 40% of LV choir members ($n=82$) and 31% of UV choir members ($n=49$) said they had no previous formal musical training. The highest proportion of **LV choir members described themselves as self-taught**, whereas **UV choir members were more likely to have formal musical training** up to the level of GCSE or A-level. However, as reflected above in *Chart 4*, LV choir members were again more likely to have been involved in formal training through church choirs or initiatives run by organisations such as the Salvation Army.

The most common qualification reported by choir members was Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) or equivalent instrumental exams, held by 68 participants (LV: 10%; UV: 31%). Others had taken ABRSM or equivalent singing exams ($n=18$) or theory exams ($n=48$). In line with *Chart 5*, a significantly higher proportion of UV choir members (29%; $n=45$) than LV choir members (9%; $n=19$) had qualifications in music at the levels of GCSE or A-level.

[S6] Most choir members had either informal or formal musical training from their community, school, church, or private tuition. UV members were more likely than LV members to have taken qualifications such as ABRSM, GCSE, or A-level exams.

Chart 5. Choir members' previous musical training



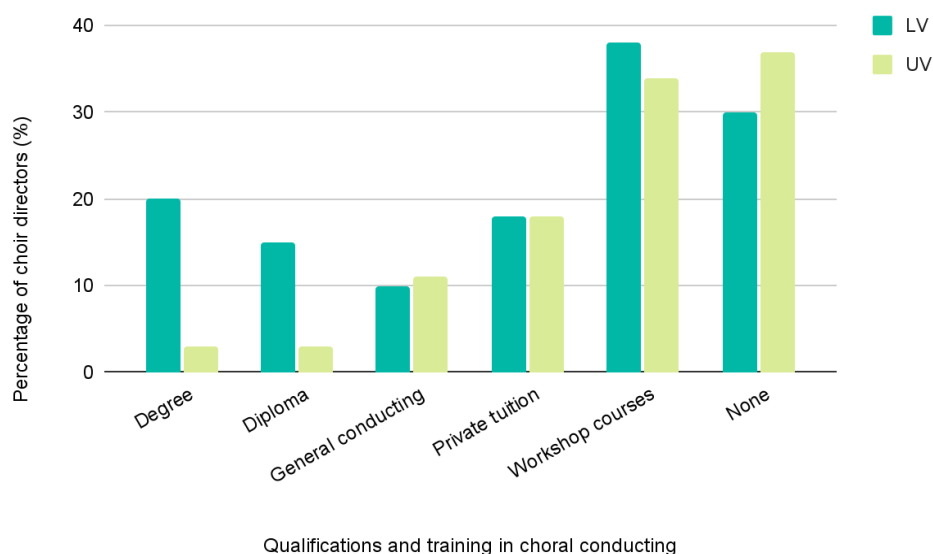
In contrast with choir members, choir directors had much higher formal qualifications in music. **63% of LV choir directors (n=25) and 58% of UV choir directors (n=22) had studied music at degree level** (or equivalent). The remainder had school music qualifications, conducting qualifications, or teaching qualifications (LV: 31%; UV: 37%), or were self-taught (LV: 10%; UV: 5%).

Choir directors had varied training in choral conducting, from conservatory degrees and diplomas to no formal training. This seems broadly to refute past assumptions that LV choirs (in particular) 'generally keep a proud distance from choral or conductor education' (Harry, 2018). However, given that very few Higher Education institutions offer degrees or diplomas in choral conducting, it seems possible that some participants may have overstated their experience, and are more likely to have studied individual modules – rather than complete courses – in choral conducting.

Nonetheless, *Chart 6* does highlight a stark contrast between the percentage of LV (35%; n=14) and UV (6%; n=2) choir directors to have had experience of choral music direction at degree or diploma level. This suggests that **UV choir directors were less likely than their LV counterparts to have any formal choral conducting training.**

[S7] Approximately 60% of LV and UV choir directors had studied music to degree level. However, LV choir directors were significantly more likely than UV choir directors to have studied choral music direction at degree or diploma level.

Chart 6. Directors' qualifications and training in choral conducting



[R4] There remains a distinct lack of training opportunities for directors of UV choirs. However, this inequity is unlikely to be overcome without systematic changes in Higher Education to eliminate the white, male conductor stereotype that dominates associated courses at universities and conservatories (Bull, 2019).

LV and UV choirs can help this systematic change happen by supporting current work investigating equality, diversity, and inclusion in Higher Education institutions (e.g., Bull et al., 2022). However, there is also a need for greater awareness of accessible workshops and training opportunities on offer from providers such as:

- ★ **Association of British Choral Directors**
<https://www.abcd.org.uk/training/abcd-courses>
- ★ **Sing for Pleasure**
<https://singforpleasure.org.uk/events/>

Providers of these courses, and other organisations that promote networking opportunities for UV and LV choirs, must recognise the need for training for choir directors who work outside the popular English Choral Tradition, in secular or community contexts. Running **conducting workshops or conferences**, facilitating **networking** among UV and LV choir directors, or launching an **awareness campaign** for conducting training are all strategies that could help initiate greater interest in professional development opportunities.

Musical skills

Choir members and directors were asked to describe the level of musical skills of the members, director, and accompanist (where applicable) of their group. As *Table 2* shows, LV and UV choir members generally thought well of their choirs – especially their directors and accompanists, of whom between 80% and 90% were judged to be 'highly' skilled. Nonetheless, **UV choirs were more satisfied with the quality of their**

members' musical skills, with 38% judging them to be 'high' ($n=59$) in comparison with only 18% judging similarly in LV choirs ($n=36$).

Table 2. Choir members' ratings of the musical skills of members, directors, and accompanists

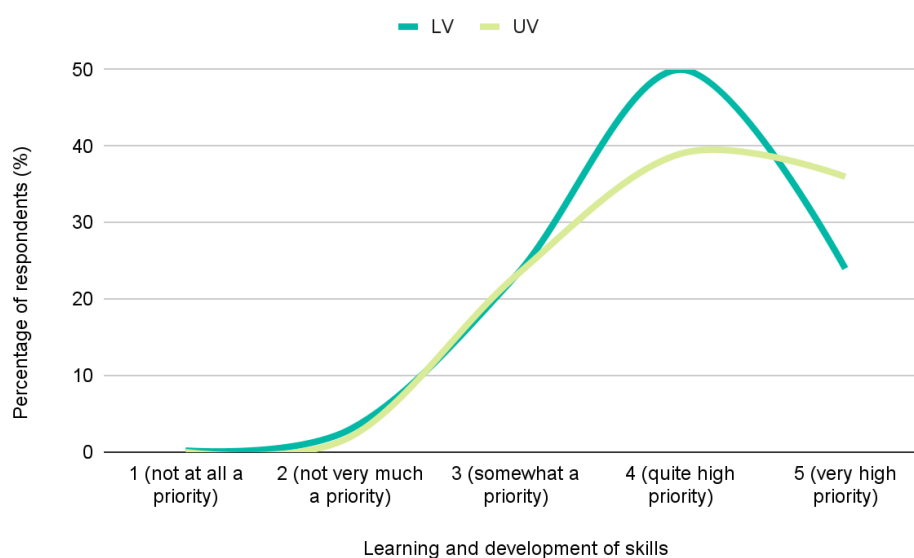
	Members		Director		Accompanist	
	LV (%)	UV (%)	LV (%)	UV (%)	LV (%)	UV (%)
High	18	38	87	89	83	77
Adequate	77	61	11	10	8	10
Low	6	1	1	0	1	0

Choir directors were less complimentary in their ratings, although the same patterns prevailed. In LV choirs, 5% of directors ranked their members as highly skilled, 70% as adequately skilled, and 20% as low skilled. In UV choirs, 16% of directors ranked their members as highly skilled, 76% as adequately skilled, and 8% as low skilled.

All participants – members, directors, and committee members – also considered how much priority was given to the development of musical skills in their choirs. The substantial **majority of participants judged musical skills to be of high priority** (Chart 7). However, LV choir participants' ratings were skewed towards 'quite high priority' while UV choir participants' ratings were skewed towards 'very high priority'.

Members, directors, and committee members of both LV and UV choirs considered the development of **vocal skills** to be of greatest importance in their choirs, followed by the development of **musical literacy**, and then by expectations for **musical self-development**. Some respondents also highlighted issues including member recruitment, diversity of musical genres, commitment to learning (in rehearsals and individually), self-confidence, and listening and performing skills as those they would most like to see improved.

Chart 7. Respondents' ratings of the priority given to learning and development of skills



[S8] In comparison to LV choir participants, UV choir participants were more likely to perceive themselves as highly skilled and as prioritising the development of their musical skills. Participants in both LV and UV choirs valued the development of vocal skills over other musical skills such as reading, listening, and performing.

Confidence

In both LV and UV choirs, around **42% of members said they were 'quite comfortable' with their singing voice**. 25% chose 'very comfortable' and 33% chose 'sometimes comfortable' or lower. Similarly, around **30% of members considered themselves 'quite comfortable' with their ability to read music**. However, in LV choirs only 18% chose 'very comfortable', whereas 53% chose 'sometimes comfortable' or lower. In contrast, 25% of UV choir members chose 'very comfortable', and 46% chose 'sometimes comfortable' or lower. Overall, choir members were more likely to describe themselves as uncomfortable reading music than as uncomfortable with their singing voice. *Charts 8A and 8B* illustrate how most choir members were happy with their existing music skills, but that **they would welcome the opportunity to improve them**:

Chart 8A. Satisfaction with music skills (LV)

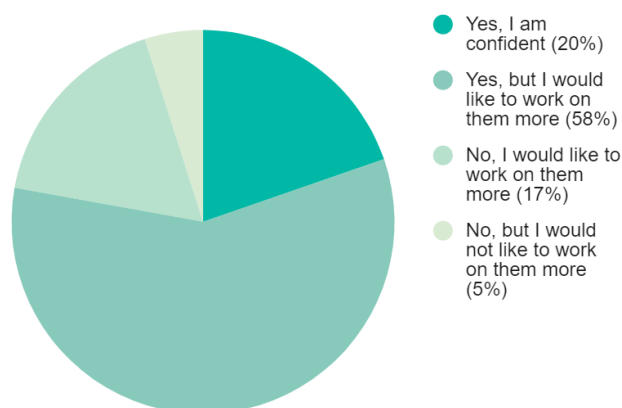
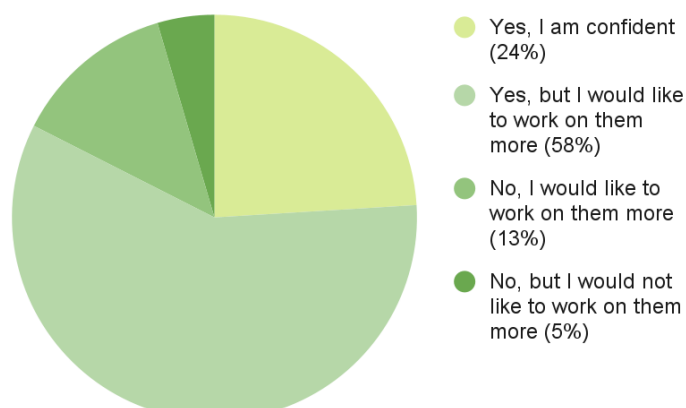


Chart 8B. Satisfaction with music skills (UV)



[S9] Most members of LV and UV choirs were comfortable and confident with their musical skills, although the majority would welcome further development of, first, their vocal skills, and second, their musical literacy.

[R5] Most current members of LV and UV choirs – especially those of an older age profile – identified as confident singers, and had a secure music education involving participation in school or church choirs. However, as choirs seek to diversify their membership and recruit younger people, they may have to adapt to cater for new members' different singing experiences. Despite nationwide initiatives such as Sing Up! (<https://www.singup.org/>), singing in schools has

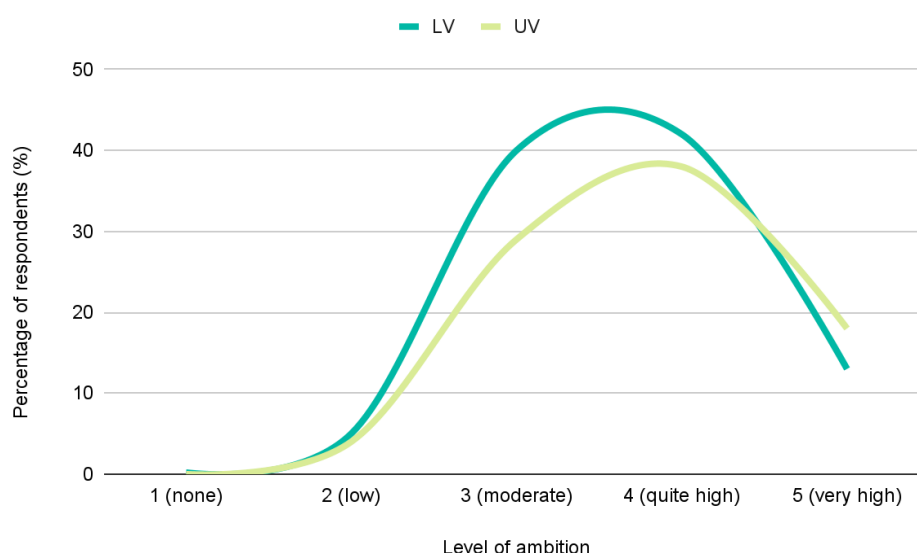
continued to decline over recent years, and it is possible that future choir members will lack the experience of current members.

LV and UV choirs should therefore consider how to **extend their educational offer** to members, offering **more opportunities for training** in vocal technique, music theory, and musicianship skills. This may include improving access to apps or courses for learning music theory, or equipping members with a variety of different learning strategies.

Ambition

Survey participants' perceptions of the levels of ambition in their choirs were in line with the findings relating to the prioritisation and perception of musical skill. As demonstrated in *Chart 9*, **the majority of participants responded that their choirs had high to very high levels of ambition**, but LV choirs generally rated their ambition lower than UV choirs.

Chart 9. Respondents' ratings of choirs' levels of ambition



Management and governance

Finance and resources

Choir committee members who participated in the survey were asked to estimate the annual running costs for their choirs. *Table 3* illustrates the results, measured by the percentage of LV and UV committee members who selected each costing.

Generally, the greatest sources of expenditure were:

1. hiring a music director;
2. hiring an accompanist;

3. hiring rehearsal venues;
4. hiring performance venues.

Publicity and music purchase also incurred significant costs for both LV and UV choirs – especially since music was typically bought rather than hired.

The most commonly used rehearsal venues were church halls ($n=68$), churches ($n=33$), town or village halls ($n=19$), community centres ($n=18$), and school halls ($n=11$). Some choirs associated with particular organisations rehearsed in associated venues such as hospitals, police headquarters, or railway social clubs.

Table 3. Committee members' estimated annual running costs

	Choir director		Accompanist		Soloists		Instrumentalists		Rehearsal venue		Uniforms		Travel expenses		Music purchase		
	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	
>£10,000	1%																
<£10,000	11%		7%						1%		1%		1%				
<£5,000	46%	50%	44%	31%	6%		2%		52%	44%	16%	2%	7%		13%	8%	
<£500	18%	13%	24%	21%	15%	8%	6%	13%	25%	38%	33%	6%	12%	15%	55%	54%	
<£50		2%		2%	3%	4%	2%	4%		4%	7%	10%	8%	2%	7%	21%	
	Music hire		Music commission		Music theory tuition		Performance venues		General equipment		Competition entry		Publicity		Professional development		
	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	LV	UV	
>£10,000																	
<£10,000							2%										
<£5,000			2%				20%	8%	6%		1%		8%			2%	
<£500	2%	2%	10%	4%	3%		28%	46%	36%	23%	12%		45%	31%	7%	6%	
<£50		4%	1%	4%			2%	8%	6%	21%	9%		20%	31%	9%	6%	

Notably, Table 3 suggests that **LV choirs tended to spend more on running costs** than UV choirs. No committee members in UV choirs indicated that they spent more than £5,000 per annum on any of the listed resources. Responses from committee members in LV choirs, however, indicated a potential annual expenditure of over £5,000 on fees for directors and accompanists, venues for rehearsals and performances, and uniforms. Similarly high costs were also highlighted by XV committee members, especially those in large choral societies or philharmonic choirs that performed regularly with professional soloists or musicians.

[S10] Greatest costs for choirs were fees for music directors and accompanists, and venues for rehearsals and performances. Expenditure on these running costs was significantly higher for LV choirs than for UV choirs.

[R6] Almost all choirs incurred significant costs for hiring music directors, accompanists, and venues. This could pose a significant problem for smaller choirs, where expenditure is more likely to be covered by expensive member

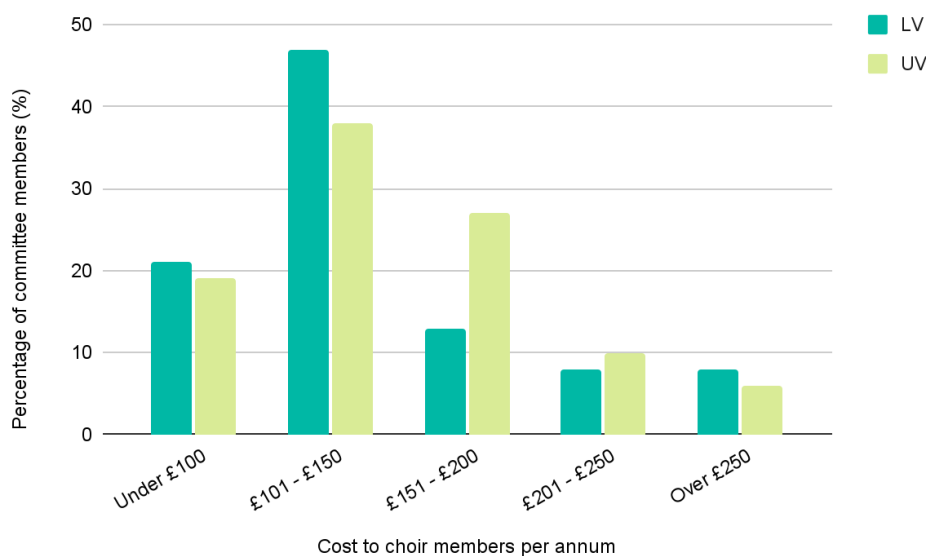
subsidies. Larger choirs are more likely to generate sufficient income with lower member subsidies supplemented by ticket sales and local partnerships.

In cases where smaller choirs face financial difficulties, recommendations include:

- ★ building at least one **strategic partnership** within the local community (such as with a church, school, or independent business) that might help further subsidise running costs (reducing rental fees or offering services such as programme printing or ticket sales).
- ★ prioritising **member recruitment** so that, proportionally, members’ subsidies are reduced.

Despite the greater running costs for LV choirs, committee members indicated that **the cost of participation for choir members was likely to be lower for LV choir members** than for UV choir members. *Chart 10* shows that 43% of UV choirs required members to pay more than the modal value of £101 to £150 per annum, while this was only expected of 29% of LV choirs.

Chart 10. Cost of participation for choir members



[S11] Choir membership typically cost between £101 and £150 per annum – but UV choirs were likely to charge more than LV choirs.

[R7] LV and UV choirs should regularly evaluate their running costs. Some medium-sized LV choirs regularly spend similar amounts to large XV choral societies who hire professional musicians, such as the Bury St Edmunds Bach Choir or the Exeter Philharmonic Choir. Likewise, UV choirs typically have higher membership fees than LV choirs that have greater running costs.

Ensuring that running costs and membership fees are **well balanced** and **well justified** should ensure that choirs nor choir members face unnecessary financial burden. For some, this may mean applying for grants to cover running costs, or implementing flexible ‘pay as you go’ or ‘pay what you can’ membership schemes.

Some choirs benefited from **financial support from local businesses or charities**. In total, 45 LV and 15 UV committee members said they generated income through charging for advertising in their concert programmes or through direct support from their local authority ($n=4$), local businesses ($n=13$), or organisations such as Homestart, the National Trust, the Armed Forces charity SSAFA, and Cooperative Food and Funeralcare. In turn, 54 LV and 22 UV committee members said their choirs **contributed to their local community through partnerships** with schools, care homes and hospices, arts and heritage festivals, organisations such as the Women’s Institute and the Rotary Club, or charities such as the Royal British Legion.

Choir committees

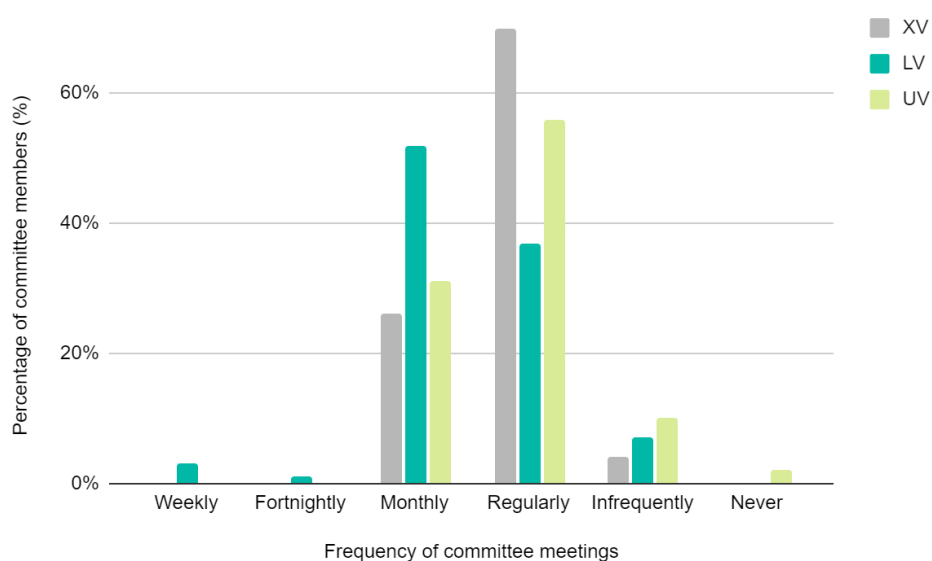
Of all the survey respondents, **23% of XV participants, 27% of LV participants, and 20% of UV participants identified as choir committee members**. Although this may suggest some disparity in the proportion of LV and UV choirs that operate formal choir committees, those who described their committees did so in similar terms. LV and UV committees typically comprised a chairperson, secretary, and treasurer. In some choirs the musical director also sat on the committee; in others they did not. Other roles represented on some committees included librarian, section leaders, membership secretary, events manager, health and safety officer, publicity and marketing officer, social secretary, webmaster, administrator, and charity trustees.

As shown in *Chart 11*, committees usually met several times a year – either once a month or once every two or three months (‘regularly’). However, while XV and UV choirs were more likely to err on the side of less frequent meetings, **LV choirs were more likely to hold committee meetings once, twice, or four times a month**.

[S12] Choir committees of XV, LV, and UV choirs had similar functions – but LV choir committees typically met more frequently than others.

[R8] Some LV and UV choir committees may benefit from basic **management and administration training**. This could make decision-making more efficient, reduce the need for frequent or time-consuming meetings, and simplify the structure of and roles within large committees. Organisations such as Making Music offer administration tools and services for their members:
<https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/mm-platform>

Chart 11. Frequency of committee meetings



Directors and accompanists

According to choir committee members, **83% of LV and 75% of UV choirs were led by a paid choir director**; 15% of LV and 25% of UV choirs were led by an unpaid volunteer. Similarly, **83% of LV and 63% of UV choirs had a designated, paid accompanist**; others had volunteer accompanists, were accompanied by their directors, or sang a cappella or with backing tracks.

Typically, committee members said they paid for the services of a choir director (LV: $n=68$; UV: $n=37$) and an accompanist (LV: $n=64$; UV: $n=31$). Several LV choirs ($n=20$) and one UV choir also employed an assistant choir director or a deputy accompanist, and there were mentions of paying technicians ($n=1$), auditors ($n=1$), orchestral musicians ($n=1$), and (Gaelic) language tutors ($n=1$). Nine LV and five UV committee members said that they did not pay anyone to contribute to the running of their choir.

Choir directors were also asked to describe their terms of employment. As shown in *Chart 12*, very few considered their directorship to be their 'day job'. Either it was **one among several freelance contracts, or an additional or voluntary role**. Full time employment with or ownership of their choir was the case for two LV directors and five UV directors. Others identified as freelancers (LV: $n=22$; UV: $n=19$) or volunteers (some of whom received an honorarium) (LV: $n=11$; UV: $n=14$). **Those who received under £1000 per annum for their role accounted for approximately 30% of both LV and UV directors**. Some others received up to or over £5000, but annual fees were equally distributed across those in LV and UV choirs (*Chart 13*).

Chart 12. Choir directors' perceptions of their employment

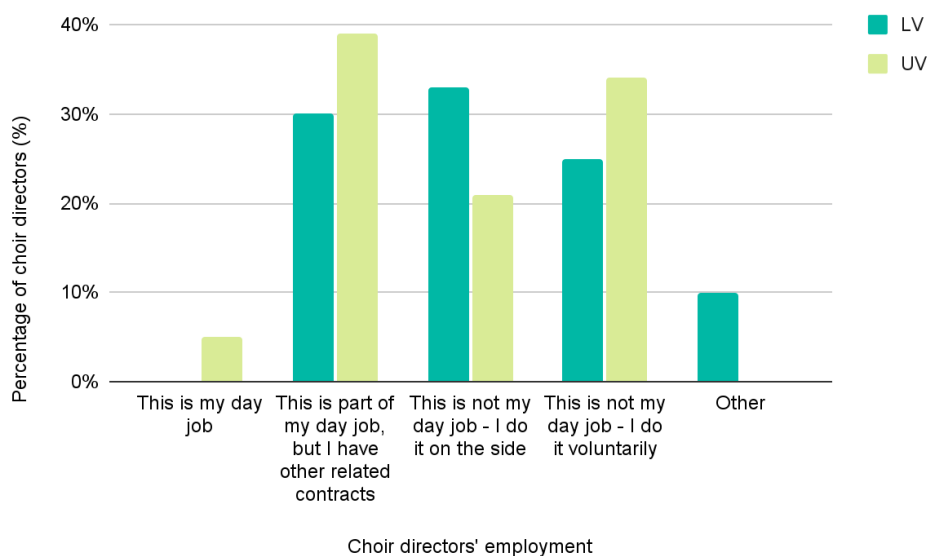
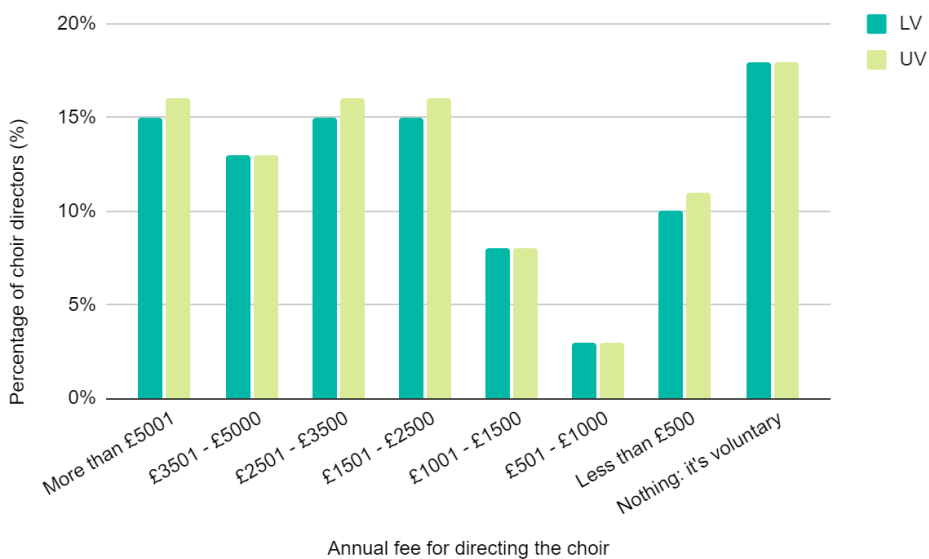


Chart 13. Choir directors' annual fees



[S13] LV choirs were more likely than UV choirs to employ a paid director and accompanist. Nonetheless, directors received similar fees regardless of whether they were employed by LV or UV choirs.

Choice of repertoire

All LV and UV choir **directors said that they chose the repertoire for their choir**, sometimes in collaboration with choir members or committees. They frequently used choir members' suggestions to source new music, alongside listening to other choirs perform and compete. 50% of all directors indicated that they 'occasionally' wrote their own arrangements for their choirs. Other directors were equally divided

between writing arrangements ‘very occasionally’ or less, or ‘sometimes’ or more. In two UV choirs, members or accompanists sometimes provided arrangements. Six LV and four UV choir directors said they had commissioned new music or arrangements, all self-funded except one funded by Arts Council Wales through Tŷ Cerdd (LV/D003), and one funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (UV/D023).

Most choir directors (LV: $n=33$; UV: $n=25$) provided their members with **a variety of learning tools for practice**, including sheet music, recordings, and access to music theory lessons or apps. However, four UV and three LV directors provided only recordings, and nine UV and four LV directors relied solely upon sheet music.

When asked about the repertoire they chose for their choirs, LV and UV directors agreed that the best music to sing ought to be **crowd pleasing** (LV: $n=26$; UV: $n=29$) and **an exciting and interesting choral challenge** (LV: $n=24$; UV: $n=24$). This was perceived to be more important than music being, for example, well known (LV: $n=10$; UV: $n=8$) or easy to learn (LV: $n=9$; UV: $n=9$). Notable favourite repertoire included:

Three LV arrangements by twentieth-century English composers:

Hubert Parry – *I was glad*;
Ralph Vaughan Williams – *Linden Lea*;
Edward Elgar – *Where corals lie*.

Two LV arrangements by Dan Forrest:

And can it be?
There is a faint music.

Two LV arrangements by Robat Arwyn:

Guardian angel;
Benedictus.

UV arrangements of music by popular contemporary choral composers:

Bob Chilcott – *Can you hear me?*
John Rutter – *For the beauty of the Earth*;
Eric Whitacre – *Seal lullaby*;
Morten Lauridsen – *Sure on this shining night*;
Ola Gjeilo – *Tundra*.

UV arrangements of music from musical theatre:

Bob Fosse and Fred Ebb – *Chicago*;
Björn Ulvaeus and Tim Rice – *Chess*;
Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus – *Mamma Mia!*

Two UV arrangements by Sarah Quartel:

As you sing;
How can I keep from singing?

Two UV arrangements by Greg Gilpin:

Why we sing;
Until we sing again.

[S14] LV and UV choir directors chose music for their choirs that they believed to be crowd pleasing and an exciting choral challenge. Many of their favourite pieces were by popular contemporary choral composers such as Eric Whitacre, Dan Forrest, and Sarah Quartel.

[R9] LV and UV choirs could play a formative role in the establishment of emerging choral composers and the circulation of new choral music. Building relationships with **local composers** or **music students** could be a cost-efficient means of sourcing new repertoire and reaching wider audiences. This could involve:

- ★ establishing **relationships with local Higher Education institutions** and music colleges. LV and UV choirs could engage composition students in new commissions, arrange composing competitions, or participate in workshops and masterclasses for emerging composers.
- ★ hosting an **'Adopt a Composer'** or **'Composer in Residence'** scheme, such as that coordinated by Making Music:
<https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/opportunities/making-music-projects/adopt-music-creator>
- ★ building **partnerships with networks** such as Sound and Music, the national organisation for the creation of new music: <https://soundandmusic.org/>

While it is valuable to support the emergence of new music, it is also important to ensure that this music can be widely circulated and reach a diverse audience. Networks of choirs and the organisations that support them could develop music-sharing databases so that new compositions and arrangements that cater for LV and UV choirs can be shared. This database could also host tools and models for EDI strategies, recruitment and retention, management and administration, and links to further useful resources.

Auditions and rehearsals

The majority of choir directors who participated in the survey **did not audition new choir members**. *Table 4* shows that LV choir directors were more likely than UV choir directors to hold auditions. Those who 'sometimes' held auditions would carry out informal voice checks or audition less confident prospective members.

Table 4. Percentage of choir directors that held auditions

	LV choir directors (%)	UV choir directors (%)
We do hold auditions	38	16
We sometimes hold auditions	12	21
We do not hold auditions	50	61

All choir directors except one structured their regular rehearsals around **revising familiar repertoire and learning new repertoire**.⁶ All except three LV choirs and two UV choirs also incorporated aspects such as physical warm-ups, vocal warm-ups, or sight-reading practice, typically for a total of 30 to 40 minutes. The modal number of pieces covered in one rehearsal was three to four (LV: $n=22$; UV: $n=23$).

Concerts and competitions

Concerts

Respondents who participated in XV choirs were most likely to indicate that their choirs performed between one and five concerts per year ($n=234$), and the same was the case in UV choirs ($n=157$). Only four respondents from UV choirs said that they performed more than ten times per year. However, **in LV choirs respondents were most likely to indicate that their choirs performed between six and ten concerts per year** ($n=137$), and a significant number ($n=103$) indicated that they performed more than ten. Nonetheless, many members of LV choirs added that they were 'happy with the current amount' of concerts (e.g., LV/M004, LV/M022), and some even suggested that 'a bit more would be enjoyable, [because] COVID has affected some gigs' (LV/M116). In contrast, **members of UV choirs were content with fewer performances**, saying they were 'happy with the current amount' of concerts (e.g., UV/M012, UV/M021), since it enabled 'a good balance of choir performances and family time' (UV/M114), and 'more would be difficult to manage with work commitments' (UV/M003).

All but seven committee members who took part in the survey said that their choirs **promoted their own concerts**, as well as being available for hire by third parties. The most **common means of concert promotion was word of mouth** (LV: 97%; UV: 98%), followed by social media (LV: 89%; UV: 83%), websites (LV: 90%; UV: 77%), posters (LV: 65%; UV: 56%), leaflets (LV: 65%; UV: 42%), editorial content in the local press (LV: 60%; UV: 38%), banners (LV: 31%; UV: 15%), paid advertisements in the local press (LV: 24%; UV: 8%), and paid advertisements on social media (LV: 21%; UV: 6%).

The high number and widespread advertisement of LV choir concerts was in accordance with members' rankings of their favourite choir activities. Unlike UV members, **LV members typically ranked concerts more highly than rehearsals and social occasions**. They also ranked associated concert tours more highly than their UV choir counterparts (*Charts 14A and 14B*).

⁶ LV/D034 described spending ten minutes each on physical warm-ups, vocal warm-ups, skills such as sight-reading, and revising familiar music – but not learning new music.

Chart 14A. Favourite choir activities (LV)

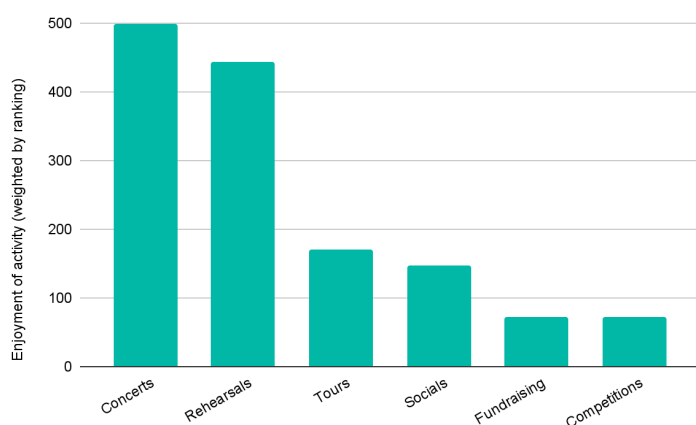
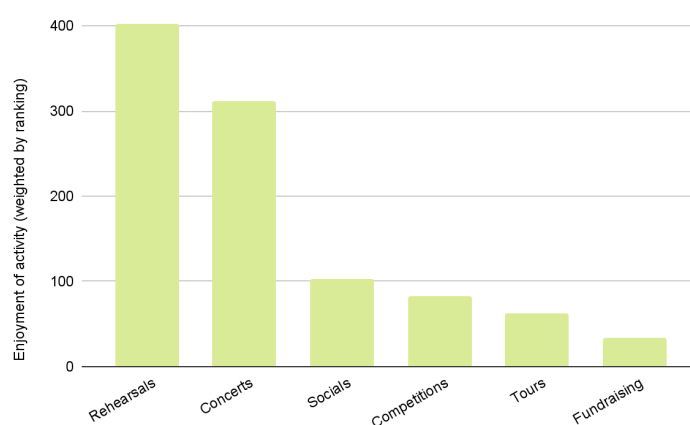


Chart 14B. Favourite choir activities (UV)



[S15] LV choirs typically performed more frequently than XV and UV choirs, and ranked performance-related activities to be of greater importance.

Competitions

In both LV and UV choirs, **around half of respondents said that they never participated in choir competitions** (LV: $n=171$, 51%; UV: $n=121$, 50%). 40% of LV respondents ($n=134$) and 44% of UV respondents ($n=106$) competed once every few years or more frequently. In comparison, XV choirs were far less likely to participate in competitions: 73% of respondents ($n=241$) said they never took part.

Survey participants described how restrictions associated with COVID-19 had reduced opportunities to enter competitions. Consequent changes in habits for some choirs meant that members had an inconsistent view of their competing or non-competing identity. Even among choirs whose members gave a consistent picture, individuals often held contrasting attitudes over the value of competing. For example, in one LV choir that competed regularly and ‘won quite a few prizes’ (LV/M138), members said:

[competitions are] a very positive experience and good to hear how other choirs are. (LV/M134)

the competitions themselves are fine but the build up is very stressful, intense and time consuming. I find it hard to put in the time necessary alongside a demanding full time job. (LV/M143)

In contrast, though some members of a non-competing LV choir were ‘happy NOT to compete’ (LV/M153), others believed that future opportunities to compete could be beneficial ‘now the choir is growing in strength’ (LV/M159).

Members of UV choirs also made similar comments, especially concerning the additional pressure of preparing for competitions alongside full time work. Members of one UV choir that competed once or twice a year agreed that they would not want to commit to any additional competitions for logistical reasons:

I would not want to do more than one or two competitions a year. I find the arrangements and the travelling can be quite onerous. But the team building is fab. (UV/M041)

I would prefer to compete once every two years – the quality of the organisation and adjudication has plummeted, and it's a lot of effort for an unfamiliar audience miles away. (UV/M043)

Furthermore, one UV member who had in the past sung in one competition pointed out that although the experience was enjoyable, it restricted their choir's usual repertoire: 'it did mean more concentration on a few pieces at the expense of the others and I enjoy the wide variety of music we sing' (UV/M006).

[S16] LV and UV choirs typically competed more frequently than XV choirs, but had fewer opportunities to do so after the COVID-19 pandemic. Choir members had mixed opinions on the relative benefits and limitations of the musical, social, and logistical aspects of competing.

[R10] Participation in LV and UV choirs is more likely to be enjoyable when the activities prioritised by the choir are in accordance with the activities preferred by the choir members.

Choir directors or committees may find it fruitful to carry out a simple poll of choir members' favourite activities to ensure that the time and resources put into **concerts, competitions, and rehearsals** is necessary and appropriate.

[R11] Organisers of choir competitions and festivals should account for some **choirs' concerns over participation in competitive performing**. They could consider offering different categories or separate events for choirs with different levels of experience, with greater emphasis on **sharing, learning, and community building**.

There remains a specific need for more festival and networking opportunities for UV choirs: organisations that run existing competitions and conferences for LV choirs should consider broadening their scope to offer equivalent experiences for UV choirs.

Perceived objectives

Choir members were asked to rank their top three choices in the following list, in regard to their choir's objectives:

Rehearsals are our main focus	Performing for our friends
Developing members' skills	Improving our performances
Competing for fun	Competing to win
Fundraising for the choir	Fundraising for charities
Social interaction for members	Social interaction for audiences
Wellbeing of members	Wellbeing of audiences

Amongst LV and UV choir members, **'improving the quality of our performances'** was most likely to be ranked first (LV: $n=101$; UV: $n=75$) and second (LV: $n=47$; UV: $n=35$). *Charts 15A and 15B* show choir members' chosen objectives, with values weighted according to their rankings. While both LV and UV choir members attributed a similar degree of importance to rehearsing and improving performing, **members of UV choirs perceived wellbeing to be of more importance than members of LV choirs**. In contrast, members of LV choirs ranked charitable fundraising and members' social interaction as more important than members' wellbeing.

This contrast between LV choirs and UV choirs was further reflected in members' perceptions of the primary benefits of singing with their choirs. As is evident from *Chart 16*, **LV members' top four rankings were all performance-related**: 'an opportunity to make music together'; 'an opportunity to prepare to perform to an audience'; 'a way to get a buzz from performing'; and 'a chance to challenge ourselves and develop our musical skills'. In comparison, UV members ranked 'a chance to forget about other cares and demands in life', and 'an opportunity to enjoy the music you love' more highly than factors related directly to public performance.

Chart 15A. Importance of choir objectives for LV choir members

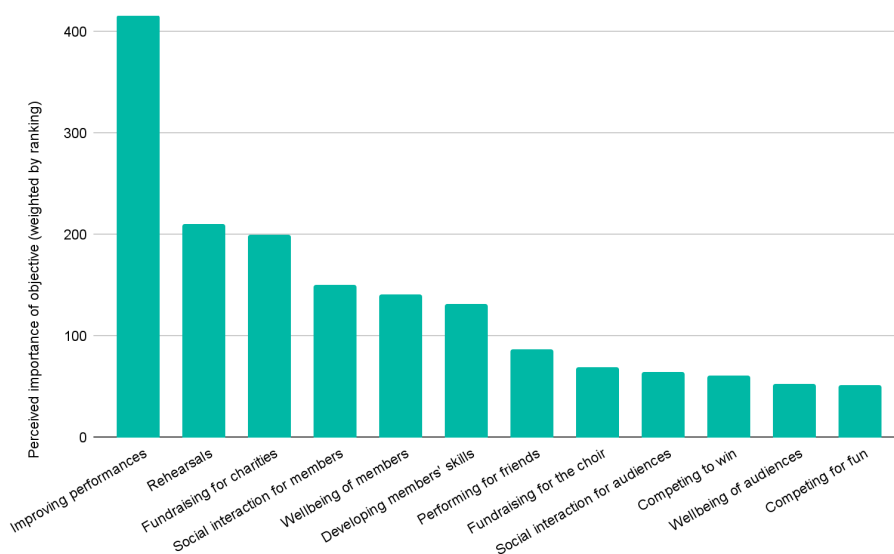
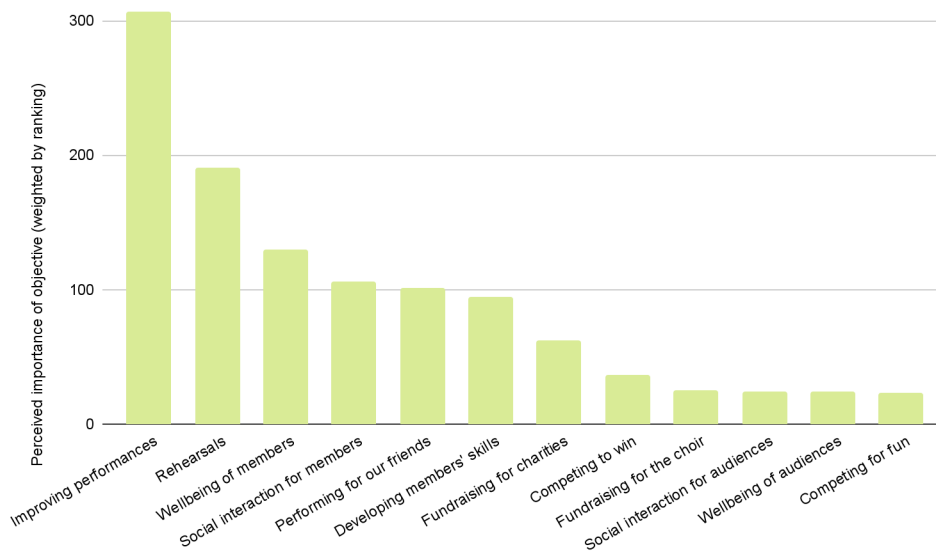


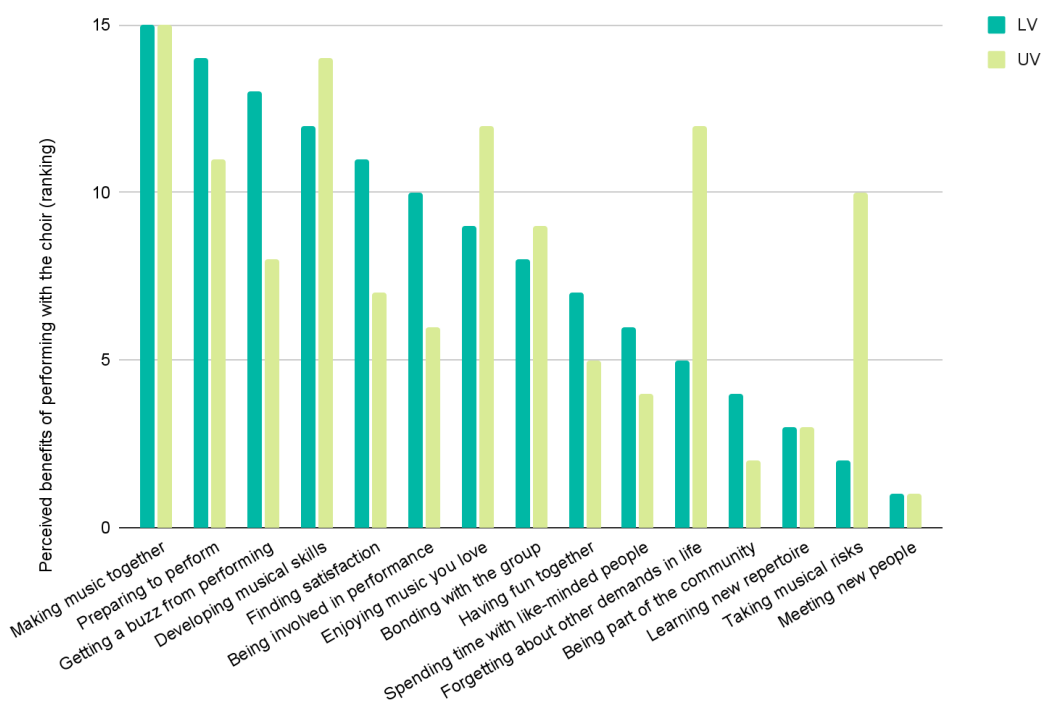
Chart 15B. Importance of choir objectives for UV choir members



Nonetheless, all members gave the lowest overall ranking to ‘a chance to meet new people’, suggesting that the combination of singing and its associated social factors – rather than social opportunities alone – may be what they find most beneficial about participation in their choirs.

[S17] LV choirs typically valued performance-related objectives most highly, whereas UV choirs valued socio-musical objectives like wellbeing and enjoyment.

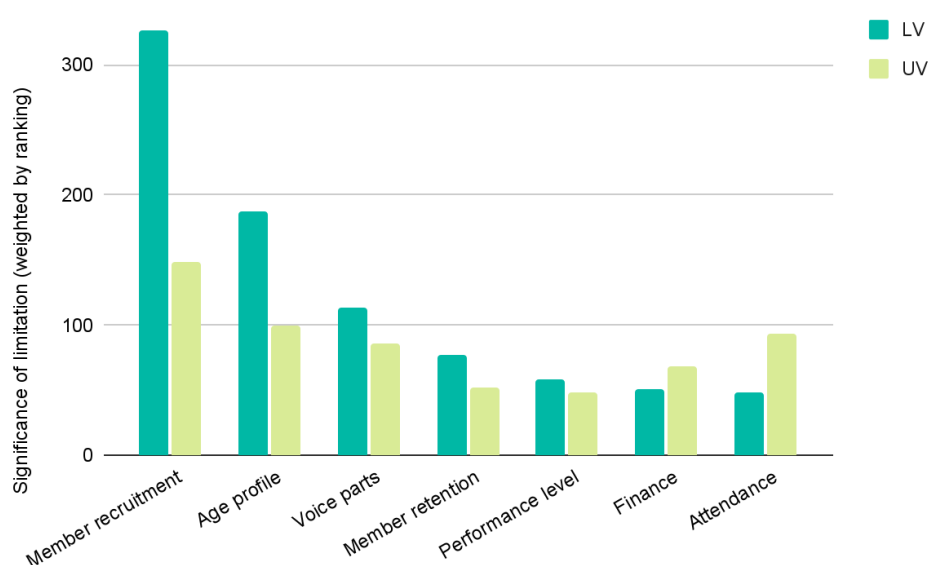
Chart 16. Choir members’ rankings of perceived benefits of performing with their choirs



Perceived limitations before COVID-19

All choir members, directors, and committee members had the opportunity to comment on factors they considered as limiting their choir, both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most common concerns surrounded **the increasing age and declining numbers of members**. There was consensus between LV and UV choir directors and committee members that member recruitment and age profile ranked as the most pressing issues for their choirs. LV directors and committee members then ranked distribution of vocal parts as next most challenging, whereas UV directors and committee members highlighted more significant concerns over attendance rates and financial stability (*Chart 17*).

Chart 17. Directors' and committee members' rankings of limitation factors for their choirs



Age and health

Directors, committee members, and members of both LV and UV choirs highlighted their **ageing membership** as one of the most significant limitations they faced. This was particularly the case in LV choirs – perhaps because of what one member called, ‘the obstinacy and inertia of men of a certain age’ (LV/C057). Age was mentioned by 63 LV members (31%), 19 LV directors (48%), and 36 LV committee members (40%). In contrast, in UV choirs age was mentioned by just 16 members (10%), 11 directors (29%), and 11 committee members (23%). Nonetheless, age caused multiple concomitant problems for many choirs. Older age was associated with **failing health**, mobility issues, and other physical limitations:

we're not as young as we were; this affects breathing, tone, accuracy, word learning, etc. (LV/D039)

It sometimes led to a narrowing of repertoire according to members' particular preferences and willingness to explore new genres:

it can be difficult to recruit younger people. The youngest person in the choir is in her late 30s. We tend to do a mixture of different musical styles but they don't necessarily appeal to everyone like, for example, one of the rock choirs might. (UV/M135)

Recruitment and attendance

For several choirs, 'as the age has risen, it has been harder to attract younger members' (LV/D036). This compounded existing issues of **member recruitment**. One choir member pointed out the difficulties in 'attract[ing] and retain[ing] interested and engaged members with a desire to learn' (LV/M137). Others added that this could be even more challenging when competing against other choirs for membership (LV/M166), or when isolated in a rural area (LV/D024).

More so than LV choir members ($n=5$), UV choir members ($n=22$) also highlighted recurring issues regarding **commitment and attendance**. Some explained,

a lot of retired members [means] choir [is] not always given the priority in their calendar I would like to see. (UV/M009)

I feel that as a bigger choir, people are less committed as they think they won't be missed in the section. (UV/M133)

In part, this appeared to be correlated with **family commitments**. UV choir participants mentioned constraints that were largely absent from LV choir participants' comments, such as those resulting from maternity leave (UV/D005), childcare (UV/D034), partners serving with the Armed Forces (UV/D015), and parenting and grandparenting responsibilities (UV/C014).

Musical ability and repertoire

Despite differing concerns over age, recruitment, attendance, and family commitments, similar numbers of LV and UV participants emphasised limitations relating to **musical ability**. LV choir participants ($n=30$) described the benefits of a non-auditioned, open-door choir being matched by potential frustrations:

as a community choir, [it's] very difficult if a new joiner has no musical voice at all. (LV/M116)

the very wide range of ability in the choir means that some take much longer to learn than others, while everyone has to be kept engaged. (LV/D007)

UV choir participants ($n=29$) highlighted how this related to **musical literacy**. Although many choirs did not require their members to read music, this could decrease self-confidence and slow down learning (UV/C043):

confidence is the main one among the members who can't read music. Our director sends out recordings of the parts but I don't think everyone practises at home. (UV/C003)

Issues of musical ability and literacy were also closely associated with other musical limitations. **Choral repertoire** and the **division of vocal parts** were concerns noted by both LV and UV choirs. Some reiterated how age and memory restricted how much new music they could learn (e.g., LV/M071, UV/M028), while others pointed out that specialist repertoire could be difficult and time-consuming to learn:

most members of the choir do not speak Welsh which makes learning the traditional Welsh songs more of a challenge. (LV/M012)

LV choirs typically bemoaned a lack of upper tenor voices (e.g., LV/M123), while UV choirs struggled with finding high quality upper soprano voices (e.g., UV/M015). Notably, several UV choir participants said that they found UV choir arrangements in and of themselves to be limiting: 'we are a female choir so only perform three parts' (UV/032); 'it would be nice to have male voices in it' (UV/M095). This most likely reflects the more recent origins of the UV choir model in comparison to the LV choir model, and the associated lack of varied and flexible repertoire.

Other limitations mentioned by a handful of participants in both LV and UV choirs included: performance logistics, such as 'distance travelled to concerts' (LV/M049); economic factors affecting the running of choirs and their individual members (e.g., LV/M072); time limitations, especially for scheduling concerts and competitions (e.g., LV/C028; UV/M064); the leadership of directors, accompanists, or committees (e.g., LV/D022; UV/C023); and accessibility (of rehearsal and performance venues, UV/M156) and diversity (of membership, UV/M146).

[S18] Participants from both LV and UV choirs were most concerned about the limitations posed by their ageing memberships. These limitations were also compounded by issues relating to member recruitment, commitment and attendance, musical ability and literacy, and repertoire and vocal parts.

[R12] As outlined in this report, the recruitment of younger members to UV and LV choirs is likely to improve in line with increased attention to EDI issues. However, further measures could also aid the recruitment of younger members:

- ★ emphasising a choir's **heritage and locality** is important in persuading new members of the value of joining a choir. Engaging in local events and contributing to diverse community initiatives (such as charitable fundraising or projects supporting minority populations) could raise a choir's visibility and accessibility to a more diverse membership.
- ★ choirs struggling with recruitment could **seek mentoring** from other local music groups that have developed successful recruitment strategies.
- ★ building **partnerships with local school, college, and university choirs** could improve chances of young people pursuing LV or UV choir membership.
- ★ developing links between local choirs and **the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain** could be fruitful for raising awareness of opportunities to sing in LV and UV settings. The National Youth Choirs already run specific pathways for girls (soprano and alto voices) and boys (treble and cambiata voices): <https://www.nycgb.org.uk/Pages/Category/our-choirs>
- ★ instituting a new national youth choir specifically for providing progression routes into the LV sector – a **National Youth Male Voice Choir**.

Perceived limitations after COVID-19

Among survey participants, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was commonly described as 'devastating', 'challenging', and 'disruptive'. A small number of participants reflected more positively that the pandemic had a 'minimal' or 'temporary' impact, and that their choirs recovered quickly. Nonetheless, these comments were outnumbered by those expressing the 'catastrophic' difficulties of singing during the pandemic.

Membership and commitment

In both LV and UV choirs, participants were most likely to describe the effects of the pandemic in relation to their choir membership and their online alternatives. 30% of LV choir participants ($n=100$) and 35% of UV choir participants ($n=84$) commented on how the **membership of their choirs** changed during the pandemic. A handful of choirs grew in number: 'we have ten MORE new singers, as people want to get into new activities, including singing' (LV/C028). A few others retained a stable membership, either because 'we worked incredibly hard to come through the pandemic largely intact and together' (LV/M054), or because departing members were quickly replaced by new recruits:

we have lost some of our older members, moved away to be with family or too immobile, but we have gained new members too so our numbers are almost back to what they were. (UV/C003)

Nonetheless, participants were far more likely to describe their membership as having decreased, sometimes substantially: 'we lost almost half our members' (LV/C075). In some instances elderly members passed away during the pandemic

(e.g., LV/D012), while others developed debilitating **health issues** (e.g., UV/D027) or **mental illness** (e.g., UV/M023) preventing them returning to choir activities. Others remained anxious about leaving home (e.g., LV/M192) or engaging in a perceived high risk activity (Public Health England, 2020):

[there is] much anxiety among members about returning to rehearsals; some left at the outset as partners were 'vulnerable'; others still haven't returned because of continuing anxiety; this on top of members moving away or retiring due to poor health has potentially made the choir unviable. (UV/C005)

For members of UV choirs in particular, regaining **enthusiasm and confidence** in singing was also noted as problematic. For some, there was a general 'loss of interest in attending rehearsals' (UV/M009), while for others, new working habits and routines affected their commitment to regular choir rehearsals:

our attendance has frequently been quite poor as people are often working from home and can't be bothered to come in. (UV/C040)

One committee member of a LV choir astutely observed a general shift in members' priorities that emerged with the lifting of pandemic restrictions:

there also seems to be a difference in commitment to attending rehearsals. Members are taking more holidays and seeing more of families now that they can again. This may be a short-term change but it means we are an ageing and declining group at present. (LV/C046)

[R13] The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of cultural and societal trauma. Even as organisations and routines resume pre-pandemic norms, trauma will have left 'an invisible but indelible mark on the individuals who experience[d] it' (Bradley & Hess, 2022). The impact of such an experience must not be underestimated, especially for vulnerable or elderly individuals who may have been isolated, ill, or bereaved during the pandemic.

LV and UV choirs need to carefully consider their response to the lasting traumatic effects of COVID-19. Those who tragically lost members to death or long-term illness should ensure that they can facilitate safe spaces to **reflect and mourn**, as well as to keep on **growing and singing** together. Making music together can have a powerful influence upon the recovery and resilience of individuals and communities; however, it can also unearth vulnerabilities and prompt re-traumatisation, and this must not be overlooked (MacGregor, 2022).

Online alternatives

Almost all choirs represented in the survey adopted an **alternative online format** during some or all of the COVID-19 pandemic. 27% of LV choir participants ($n=91$) and 32% of UV choir participants ($n=77$) described using Zoom (or Skype or WhatsApp) to maintain regular meetings with their choirs. Others held additional **meetings outdoors** when the restrictions allowed (LV: $n=14$; UV: $n=12$).

Many choirs used Zoom for rehearsals and ‘the opportunity to develop our music theory and new pieces’ (LV/M144). But others found online meetings more helpful for alternative project-based activities and social entertainment:

from day one our MD implemented weekly Zoom rehearsals with most members joining from time to time. We also put on a largely live twelve-hour Performathon on YouTube with individual choir members performing items of their choice, for the benefit of three charities, and held regular Zoom quizzes. (LV/C043)

we held Zoom rehearsals (unsatisfactory but we still managed to learn some new pieces and even record them) and we held many more social events including baking classes, yoga, mindfulness and 'Desert Island Discs' evenings. (UV/M153)

Participants who were involved with activities such as those mentioned by LV/C043 and UV/M153 typically described increased **social interaction** and feeling ‘closer to each other’ (UV/D033) within their choirs:

[the pandemic] brought us closer together via regular Zoom rehearsals and online chat as well as time spent fundraising in unusual ways and supporting more isolated/elderly members. (LV/M095)

In several choirs, online meetings were specifically dedicated to education around wellbeing and mental health. For example,

we quickly developed a different strategy and approach through lockdown – shorter and more frequent rehearsal[s] with 'social' and 'wellbeing' elements in addition to singing. (LV/M163)

Nonetheless, in many choirs the shift towards online provision during COVID-19 was perceived as insufficient: ‘Zoom [was] not a useful aid but at least kept us in contact’ (LV/C066); ‘we lost the pleasure of singing together for which there was no substitute’ (UV/M086). Some participants noted that the emergent reliance on technology exacerbated existing inequalities. If ‘not all [members] had access to

computers' (LV/M044) then choirs were unable to meet as a whole group, and when 'some members used Zoom to rehearse but some were not able, this was divisive' (UV/C018). In some instances, it led to further divisions and limitations relating to individual **musical ability and development**:

our young MD held us together beautifully through our weekly choir Zoom choir meetings. Those who joined in, over half, had the opportunity to duet with our MD (a professional baritone) and learn new repertoire whilst other parts were practising. When we returned to face to face rehearsals those who had not Zoomed or practised at home had to play catch up with the Zoomers. So I do feel that Zooming during the pandemic divided us but for me it kept me sane. (UV/M015)

Several members commented that their 'vocal performance had reduced' (LV/M002), or that meeting online slowed down the learning process and led to a 'hiatus in learning new pieces' (LV/M069) or a return to 'singing easier pieces' (UV/M011).

[S19] Online formats used during the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to increase social interaction and sense of community when used creatively. However, for some choirs they exacerbated divisions and slowed down learning.

[R14] Wherever possible, choirs should resume in-person rehearsals and performances. Singing together in the same physical space is the best possible means of making music, and does not rely upon individuals' technological capabilities.

Nonetheless, choirs that adopted creative ways of networking during the COVID-19 pandemic may benefit from maintaining regular online contact to promote social wellbeing and engagement. This could include:

- ★ communication via **messaging platforms** such as Facebook or WhatsApp.
- ★ circulation of a **weekly or monthly email newsletter**.
- ★ optional **meetings during choir vacation periods**, so that members who wish to do so can stay in touch via platforms such as Zoom or Skype.
- ★ one-off meetings for **social events**, lectures, or masterclasses.
- ★ one-off meetings for **recruiting new members**, such as taster sessions or singing lessons.

Performance and fundraising

Choir directors and committee members showed particular concern over the lack of **performance opportunities** during the pandemic and the knock-on effects that emerged once restrictions had eased:

the network of contacts that used to contact us for concert requests have gone, hence [a] reduction of concerts performed. (LV/C035)

it has had a negative effect on our public profile, and one particular venue which we used to be booked to perform at for Christmas each year has not asked us back. This represents a good chunk of our yearly income and a huge loss of visibility. (UV/C023)

Nonetheless, others managed to embark on new repertoire 'that we have since performed' (UV/D028) or arrange 'online YouTube performances' (LV/M200) during pandemic restrictions. Some (primarily UV) choirs also initiated creative **fundraising projects** such as choir videos (UV/C041), sponsored walks (UV/M036), charity busking (UV/M102), and online auctions (LV/C022) to support themselves or their chosen charities while income from member subsidies and concert tickets was low.

Directors and committees

The initiation of creative projects during COVID-19 was only feasible for choirs that were well-supported by the **leadership** of their directors or committees. One choir experienced 'lots of arguing over what they should do to keep going' (LV/D037). But many had proactive leaders who encouraged perseverance ($n=22$) or sourced external support from charities such as Making Music ($n=2$):

our committee kept data on how many members were vaccinated, studied the rules to determine when within them we could safely get together [...]. Throughout our committee kept in touch with members, consulted us on all steps to get back together to ensure members were comfortable with coming back together. (LV/M072)

we were well supported by Making Music, the membership organisation, who ran lots of webinars and kept us updated on the rules affecting choirs. When we started performing again and rehearsing in person, their draft risk assessments helped us stay safe and comply with legislation. (UV/M064)

Nonetheless, even for choirs that emerged relatively unscathed from the pandemic, it took a significant toll on directors: 'making necessary arrangements to comply with changing regulations and guidance was very stressful for [our] musical director' (UV/C005); 'we emerged with the same group that we started with. It was hard work for me, mind you!' (UV/D033). This was a concern shared by some other participants, who highlighted the way in which **the long-term effects of the pandemic might exacerbate existing issues and limitations** in their choirs:

there has been a step change rather than a gradual decline in the physical condition of our older members. (LV/M103)

Thus, even though COVID-19 in some instances ‘strengthened the resolve of members to get back to singing’ (LV/C082) and made them ‘more determined and more aware of [its] benefits’ (UV/D014), it remains unclear whether these positive outcomes will prevail over the growing issues of members’ increasing age and declining health.

[S20] In the short term, most LV and UV choirs found the COVID-19 pandemic challenging musically, socially, and financially. In the long term, choirs’ existing issues of ageing membership may be exacerbated by changes in lifestyle choices, ongoing illness, and death.

[R15] Following the COVID-19 pandemic there will be an increased need for choirs to adapt to changes in members’ lifestyles and wellbeing. Each choir’s response will be unique to its community setting. For example:

- ★ **attendance** could be improved through more flexible or less frequent rehearsal times.
- ★ **confidence** could be developed through sustained work on straightforward repertoire chosen to improve specific vocal skills such as stamina, range, and blend.
- ★ **accessibility** could be maintained through online communication and support for members who are too vulnerable to return to singing in person.
- ★ **recruitment** of younger members could be initiated through improving a choir’s visibility in spaces such as local workplaces, social clubs, pubs, and festivals. This could be through formal or informal performances, workshops, or masterclasses.

Summary and recommendations

This report outlines the findings from a survey of 907 participants in mixed voice (XV) choirs, lower voice (LV) choirs, and upper voice (UV) choirs. Participants described joining a choir **to enjoy singing with others** – both social and musical aspects were considered important.

At the outset of this report, two questions were posed regarding the current state of LV and UV choirs in the UK:

- [Q1]** How has the male voice choir landscape changed in the past decade, and what new challenges face the sector as a result of COVID-19?
- [Q2]** What is the current picture of female voice choirs, including their membership, musical aims, and financial and governance practices?

Data from this survey has shown that the LV and UV choirs represented typically followed **similar organisational models**, overseen by a musical director paid or unpaid), an accompanist (where necessary), and a committee. They usually rehearsed a broad range of choral repertoire once a week, with the aid of sheet music and recordings. Demographically, choir members were typically **aged between 65 and 74, White British, cisgender, and heterosexual**, although UV choirs were somewhat more diverse in age and ethnicity than LV choirs. UV choir members were also more likely than their LV counterparts to hold **formal qualifications in music**, although UV choir directors were significantly less likely than their LV counterparts to have been trained in **choral direction at degree or diploma level**. LV and UV choirs also differed significantly in their approaches to concerts and competitions. LV choirs attributed higher value and greater benefits to performance-related objectives, whereas UV choirs were more likely to prioritise socio-musical factors such as members' wellbeing. In turn, LV choirs **performed with greater frequency**, while UV choirs recognised the importance of arranging performances around **work and family commitments**.

The most pressing issues facing LV and UV choirs were related to **members' age and health**, and **recruiting and retaining new members**. This was especially pertinent in LV choirs with the highest proportion of members aged 75 or over, but was exacerbated across all choirs by the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 was detrimental for many choirs, who lost members to **illness and death**. Nonetheless, some choirs were able to implement **creative online initiatives** that improved their social closeness and interaction, in spite of the ongoing challenges surrounding maintaining a viable membership.

This report also posed two questions related to challenges faced by LV and UV choirs, and recommended strategies for facing such issues:

[Q3] What are the challenges to choirs in sustaining membership and increasing musical ambition?

[Q4] What recommendations and strategies can be made to support the diversity, sustainability, and development of choirs?

A summary of these challenges and recommendations is given below:

Choir demographics

[R1] Responses to this survey suggest that some choirs may experience conflict between members that identify as transgender, non-binary, homosexual, or bisexual, and members that are unwilling to engage with issues of gender and sexuality. This could cause exclusion or discrimination. It is therefore recommended that all LV and UV choirs publish an appropriate inclusion policy to ensure that their collective aims around equity and access are more visible than individual members' biases. Where possible, this policy should be accessible to the public, online or through the choir's usual means of communication.

Further advice, resources, and examples of policies are available from several organisations, including:

- ★ **Association of British Choral Directors:**
<https://www.abcd.org.uk/Resources/Choral-leader-resources>
- ★ **British Association of Barbershop Singers:**
<https://www.singbarbershop.com/diversity-and-inclusion-team>
- ★ **Ladies Association of British Barbershop Singers:**
<https://www.labbs.org.uk/diversity>

[R2] The ageing population – and associated age-related health issues – of both LV and UV choirs was highlighted as a major concern to choir members, directors, and committees. Especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, some choirs lost elderly members to illness and death, but struggled to recruit new members of a younger age profile.

Difficulties in recruiting from a more diverse demographic may be related to some choirs' lack of engagement with issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Young people who are committed to tackling social inequity may be less likely to join an ageing choir in which members disregard issues of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or disability.

It is therefore recommended that LV and UV choirs address their understanding of EDI issues as a matter of utmost importance. As well as developing an inclusion policy, choir directors and committees should pursue EDI training and seek out examples of best practice from other choirs:

- ★ **I'M IN – The Inclusive Music Index** is an EDI self-analysis tool designed for music organisations by **Music Masters**. The Independent Route can be accessed by anyone, for free: <https://musicmasters.org.uk/im-in/>
- ★ members of organisations such as the **Musicians' Union**, **Independent Society of Musicians**, **Making Music**, and **Music Mark** can access EDI training and support online, and join nationwide networks of under-represented musicians.
- ★ music education advocate **Nate Holder** writes a regular blog related to EDI, #DecoloniseMusicEd: <https://www.nateholdermusic.com/blog>
- ★ choirs such as **SHE Choir** explain their inclusive ethos in their online resources: <https://shechoir.com/>

[R3] Individual choirs' efforts to raise awareness of EDI should be supplemented by support from choral associations and networks. Organisations such as the Association of British Choral Directors, Sing for Pleasure, Making Music, and Peterborough Sings! should consider establishing accessible resource bases that cater to the needs of LV and UV choirs. EDI training should be tailored specifically to the membership of UV and LV choirs, who may have little existing awareness of EDI issues and the concerns they raise for younger generations.

Accessible resources tailored for UV and LV choirs could include:

- ★ basic **information sheets** on specific EDI issues.
- ★ short **online workshops** on EDI awareness.
- ★ frameworks or **policy templates** for developing inclusivity.
- ★ links to **websites** and organisations offering further resources or training.
- ★ live or pre-recorded **webinars** on topics such as ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and disability and how they impact participation in a choir.
- ★ online or in-person **networking sessions** for existing choir directors and committees to meet other diverse choirs and share best practice for EDI in member recruitment.

Education, confidence, and ambition

[R4] There remains a distinct lack of training opportunities for directors of UV choirs. However, this inequity is unlikely to be overcome without systematic changes in Higher Education to eliminate the white, male conductor stereotype that dominates associated courses at universities and conservatories (Bull, 2019).

LV and UV choirs can help this systematic change happen by supporting current work investigating equality, diversity, and inclusion in Higher Education institutions (e.g., Bull et al., 2022). However, there is also a need for greater awareness of accessible workshops and training opportunities on offer from providers such as:

- ★ **Association of British Choral Directors**
<https://www.abcd.org.uk/training/abcd-courses>
- ★ **Sing for Pleasure**
<https://singforpleasure.org.uk/events/>

Providers of these courses, and other organisations that promote networking opportunities for UV and LV choirs, must recognise the need for training for choir directors who work outside the popular English Choral Tradition, in secular or community contexts. Running **conducting workshops or conferences**, facilitating **networking** among UV and LV choir directors, or launching an **awareness campaign** for conducting training are all strategies that could help initiate greater interest in professional development opportunities.

[R5] Most current members of LV and UV choirs – especially those of an older age profile – identified as confident singers, and had a secure music education involving participation in school or church choirs. However, as choirs seek to diversify their membership and recruit younger people, they may have to adapt to cater for new members' different singing experiences. Despite nationwide initiatives such as Sing Up! (<https://www.singup.org/>), singing in schools has continued to decline over recent years, and it is possible that future choir members will lack the experience of current members.

LV and UV choirs should therefore consider how to **extend their educational offer** to members, offering **more opportunities for training** in vocal technique, music theory, and musicianship skills. This may include improving access to apps or courses for learning music theory, or equipping members with a variety of different learning strategies.

Management and governance

[R6] Almost all choirs incurred significant costs for hiring music directors, accompanists, and venues. This could pose a significant problem for smaller choirs, where expenditure is more likely to be covered by expensive member subsidies. Larger choirs are more likely to generate sufficient income with lower member subsidies supplemented by ticket sales and local partnerships.

In cases where smaller choirs face financial difficulties, recommendations include:

- ★ building at least one **strategic partnership** within the local community (such as with a church, school, or independent business) that might help further subsidise running costs (reducing rental fees or offering services such as programme printing or ticket sales).
- ★ prioritising **member recruitment** so that, proportionally, members' subsidies are reduced.

[R7] LV and UV choirs should regularly evaluate their running costs. Some medium-sized LV choirs regularly spend similar amounts to large XV choral societies who hire professional musicians, such as the Bury St Edmunds Bach Choir or the Exeter Philharmonic Choir. Likewise, UV choirs typically have higher membership fees than LV choirs that have greater running costs.

Ensuring that running costs and membership fees are **well balanced** and **well justified** should ensure that choirs nor choir members face unnecessary financial burden. For some, this may mean applying for grants to cover running costs, or implementing flexible 'pay as you go' or 'pay what you can' membership schemes.

[R8] Some LV and UV choir committees may benefit from basic **management and administration training**. This could make decision-making more efficient, reduce the need for frequent or time-consuming meetings, and simplify the structure of and roles within large committees. Organisations such as Making Music offer administration tools and services for their members: <https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/mm-platform>

[R9] LV and UV choirs could play a formative role in the establishment of emerging choral composers and the circulation of new choral music. Building relationships with **local composers** or **music students** could be a cost-efficient means of sourcing new repertoire and reaching wider audiences. This could involve:

- ★ establishing **relationships with local Higher Education institutions** and music colleges. LV and UV choirs could engage composition students in new commissions, arrange composing competitions, or participate in workshops and masterclasses for emerging composers.
- ★ hosting an **'Adopt a Composer'** or 'Composer in Residence' scheme, such as that coordinated by Making Music: <https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/opportunities/making-music-projects/adopt-music-creator>
- ★ building **partnerships with networks** such as Sound and Music, the national organisation for the creation of new music: <https://soundandmusic.org/>

While it is valuable to support the emergence of new music, it is also important to ensure that this music can be widely circulated and reach a diverse audience. Networks of choirs and the organisations that support them could develop music-sharing databases so that new compositions and arrangements that cater for LV and UV choirs can be shared. This database could also host tools and models for EDI strategies, recruitment and retention, management and administration, and links to further useful resources.

Concerts and competitions

[R10] Participation in LV and UV choirs is more likely to be enjoyable when the activities prioritised by the choir are in accordance with the activities preferred by the choir members.

Choir directors or committees may find it fruitful to carry out a simple poll of choir members' favourite activities to ensure that the time and resources put into **concerts, competitions, and rehearsals** is necessary and appropriate.

[R11] Organisers of choir competitions and festivals should account for some **choirs' concerns over participation in competitive performing**. They could consider offering different categories or separate events for choirs with different levels of experience, with

greater emphasis on **sharing, learning, and community building**.

There remains a specific need for more festival and networking opportunities for UV choirs: organisations that run existing competitions and conferences for LV choirs should consider broadening their scope to offer equivalent experiences for UV choirs.

Perceived limitations

[R12] As outlined in this report, the recruitment of younger members to UV and LV choirs is likely to improve in line with increased attention to EDI issues. However, further measures could also aid the recruitment of younger members:

- ★ emphasising a choir's **heritage and locality** is important in persuading new members of the value of joining a choir. Engaging in local events and contributing to diverse community initiatives (such as charitable fundraising or projects supporting minority populations) could raise a choir's visibility and accessibility to a more diverse membership.
- ★ choirs struggling with recruitment could **seek mentoring** from other local music groups that have developed successful recruitment strategies.
- ★ building **partnerships with local school, college, and university choirs** could improve chances of young people pursuing LV or UV choir membership.
- ★ developing links between local choirs and **the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain** could be fruitful for raising awareness of opportunities to sing in LV and UV settings. The National Youth Choirs already run specific pathways for girls (soprano and alto voices) and boys (treble and cambiata voices): <https://www.nycgb.org.uk/Pages/Category/our-choirs>
- ★ instituting a new national youth choir specifically for providing progression routes into the LV sector – a **National Youth Male Voice Choir**.

[R13] The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of cultural and societal trauma. Even as organisations and routines resume pre-pandemic norms, trauma will have left 'an invisible but indelible mark on the individuals who experience[d] it' (Bradley & Hess, 2022). The impact of such an experience must not be underestimated, especially for vulnerable or elderly individuals who may have been isolated, ill, or bereaved during the pandemic.

LV and UV choirs need to carefully consider their response to the lasting traumatic effects of COVID-19. Those who tragically lost members to death or long-term illness should ensure that they can facilitate safe spaces to **reflect and mourn**, as well as to keep on **growing and singing** together. Making music together can have a powerful influence upon the recovery and resilience of individuals and communities; however, it can also unearth vulnerabilities and prompt re-traumatisation, and this must not be overlooked (MacGregor, 2022).

[R14] Wherever possible, choirs should resume in-person rehearsals and performances. Singing together in the same physical space is the best possible means of making music, and does not rely upon individuals' technological capabilities.

Nonetheless, choirs that adopted creative ways of networking during the COVID-19 pandemic may benefit from maintaining regular online contact to promote social wellbeing and engagement. This could include:

- ★ communication via **messaging platforms** such as Facebook or WhatsApp.
- ★ circulation of a **weekly or monthly email newsletter**.

- ★ optional **meetings during choir vacation periods**, so that members who wish to do so can stay in touch via platforms such as Zoom or Skype.
- ★ one-off meetings for **social events**, lectures, or masterclasses.
- ★ one-off meetings for **recruiting new members**, such as taster sessions or singing lessons.

[R15] Following the COVID-19 pandemic there will be an increased need for choirs to adapt to changes in members' lifestyles and wellbeing. Each choir's response will be unique to its community setting. For example:

- ★ **attendance** could be improved through more flexible or less frequent rehearsal times.
- ★ **confidence** could be developed through sustained work on straightforward repertoire chosen to improve specific vocal skills such as stamina, range, and blend.
- ★ **accessibility** could be maintained through online communication and support for members who are too vulnerable to return to singing in person.
- ★ **recruitment** of younger members could be initiated through improving a choir's visibility in spaces such as local workplaces, social clubs, pubs, and festivals. This could be through formal or informal performances, workshops, or masterclasses.

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