

Youth Choir Consultation

Essex Music Service plan to re-launch the Essex Youth Choir in the next Academic Year and are keen to understand how it can best meet the needs and aspirations of Essex students. In the Spring term, we ran an open consultation consisting of:

- A questionnaire emailed to all our existing students and all secondary schools in Essex
- Two focus groups with interested students, one in Colchester and one held online.

The consultation sought to understand what format, genre and style young people would be most interested in as well as what they would particularly want to get out of joining a County-wide choir.

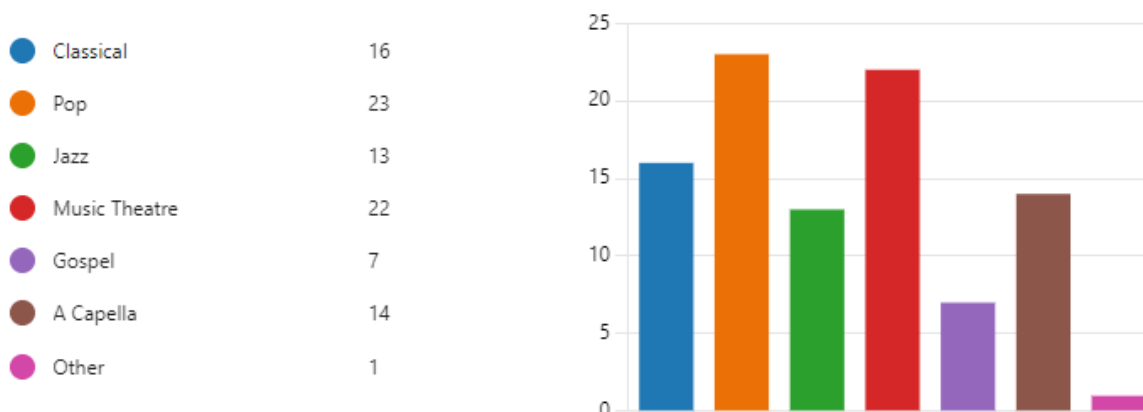
Online questionnaire Findings

The questionnaire was fully completed by 31 students over the course of 1 month.

Key preferences

The answers to the questionnaire showed a clear preference in the following areas:

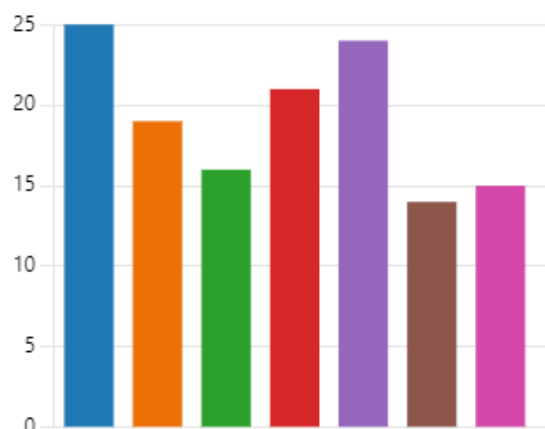
- Courses in the Summer holidays would be the most popular, followed by October half term.
- The top 4 genres were Pop, Musical Theatre, Classical and A Capella
- The vast majority of participants classified their ability as Intermediate (had some training)
- The top 4 things that appeal most to students about joining a Youth Choir are:
 - Another chance to sing
 - Develop musically and vocally
 - Work with professional musicians
 - Concerts in professional venues



3. What appeals to you about the Essex Youth Choir? (select all that apply)

[More Details](#)

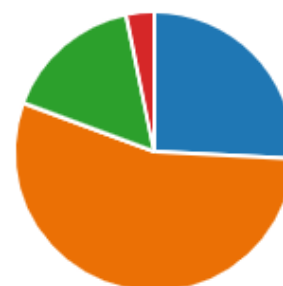
● Another chance to sing	25
● Concerts in professional venues	19
● Chance to meet like-minded sin...	16
● Work with professional musician...	21
● Develop musically and vocally	24
● National tours	14
● International tours	15
● Other	0



5. How would you describe your level of ability?

[More Details](#)

● Beginner/sings for fun	8
● Intermediate - had some training	17
● Experienced singer - able to rea...	5
● Advanced - taking higher grade...	1



The age of respondents was skewed towards Secondary School students although that is probably based on who was targeted by the questionnaire.

The questionnaire did not show a clear preference on what type of rehearsals the choir should have with an equal split between 2-3 hour masterclasses, 1-2 day non-residential workshops and 2-3 day residential workshops. Most students would prefer activity to happen in the Summer holiday or the October half-term which does present some challenges in creating a programme that can happen across the year and is something to be considered.

Focus Groups Findings

We held two focus groups, one in Colchester with 3 students and one online with 3 students. Both groups had similar views after looking at the questionnaire results and discussing what a Youth Choir could look like.

Participants

- The Choir should be inclusive and open to anyone who enjoys singing.



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- It should be open to a wider range of ages, perhaps from KS2 upwards but then be split into ability levels in some way. The groups agreed that it would be ideal if there could be an informal workshop day where students with higher level ability were identified naturally and directed towards a higher-level group. They liked the idea of a larger group open to all students learning repertoire with a smaller, higher-level group working on harder arrangements of the same repertoire that could then be brought together as a concert.
- The groups emphasised the importance to them of feeling comfortable, both social and musically, and having the ability to make connections
- It was recommended to recruit students through the EMS Music Tutors and Teaching staff within schools.

Format

- A residential course would help with meeting like-minded students, socialising and boosting confidence although it was agreed that this wouldn't necessarily be appropriate for all age groups
- Performances are important as it leaves you with a key memory
- The students liked the idea of an intensive short term course with a performance at the end.
- The group wanted the rehearsal time to be run professionally to ensure good progress is made.

Content

- If the content is difficult given most students identified as intermediate, it would be helpful to have some sessions leading up to it to help with note reading
- It would be good to see some element of Youth voice in the choice of repertoire and the group emphasised the importance of having relatable songs, or songs that are in place to specifically teach an aspect of music.
- It should teach students new things.
- Students in Colchester identified the opportunity to perform as part of wider community events such as in Castle Park or as part of festivals.

Recommendations

- Feedback the findings to all participants.
- As the Summer holidays is the preferred time for attending Choir events, hold some taster events/workshops over the Summer holidays to promote the new programme and given students a taster of what to expect.
- Consider the most appropriate model to staff the Choir, potentially including a mix of external, inspirational Choir Leaders and internal Music Tutors who can provide consistency across each event.
- Create a programme for the Academic Year 2023-2024 of up to 3 events that:
 - Offer an open invitation to all young people to participate in singing



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- Offer a more advanced option for higher ability students to run alongside the wider offer
- Run as 1-2 day non-residential courses
- Cover different genres each time – Pop, Musical Theatre, Classical and A Capella being the most popular
- Take ongoing feedback from young people participating to see how the programme can be developed for the following year
- Include performances at the end of each course, either internally or as part of a wider event in the local area
- Are accessible in location – perhaps offering each course in a different location if possible
- Enable young people to sign up to the programme following the taster sessions over the Summer holidays
- Promote the taster sessions through existing singing groups, music tutors and schools



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