

Creative Ireland & Youth Singing in Ireland



'If arts have a place in society, they must be part of the community. To be an artist is not the privilege of a few but the necessity of us all.'

Robert Lawson Shaw, Conductor (1916-1999).



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
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The views set out in the paper are the author's and do not represent a formal Creative Ireland Programme Office/Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht position on the content.

Report for Creative Ireland

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A note on definitions

Youth is defined as primary school aged children for the purposes of this report. It is recommended that an Action Research Phase focus on primary school age in 2019 but simultaneously develop a dialogue and planning mechanism to extend the project to secondary schools.

A National Youth Singing Project is a creativity programme, equally located in education and the arts, potentially delivered by a consortium of stakeholders in the group singing sector and principally with Sing Ireland (SI).

Group singing, collective singing, classroom singing, vocal work including beatboxing and rapping, the more traditional label of 'choir', as well as a myriad of other terms are all valid designations for groups of people singing together. For the purposes of this report, all such forms are referred to as group singing.

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I wish to acknowledge the time and effort of everyone involved in the far-reaching consultation on youth singing in Ireland undertaken during this research. Considerable momentum was built during the process; significant numbers of partners supportive of the development a national youth singing project have been amassed and creative processes grounded in singing have been explored. This is an exciting time for youth singing in Ireland and there is significant appetite, anticipation and support within the sector for development of a national youth singing project.

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Amond O'Brien, Mary	<i>Aspiro and RTÉ Cór na nÓg</i>	Ledgard, Rebecca	<i>Ex Cathedra</i>
Barrett, Martin	<i>PDST</i>	Lodge, Katie	<i>NYCGB</i>
Bayliss, Darren	<i>Code Club</i>	Love, Sean	<i>Fighting Words</i>
Bergin, Grace	<i>CIT Cork School of Music</i>	McAdoo, Dr Kirstie	<i>Airfield Estate</i>
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Bishop, Lesley	<i>RTÉ Orchestras, Quartet and Choirs</i>	McIlduff, John	<i>Dumbworld</i>
Breslin, Brendan	<i>RIAM</i>	McKenna, Shane	<i>Dabbledoo Music</i>
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Doris, Prof. Clíona	<i>TU Dublin Conservatory of Music and Drama</i>	Ní Thiománaigh, Mairéad	<i>Geal Linn</i>
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Griffin, Clare	<i>DES</i>	Ryan, Amy	<i>Cuore and RIAM</i>
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Irvine, Brian	<i>Dumbworld</i>	Segers, Liesbeth	<i>Koorenstem</i>
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Foreword: Why Singing for Every Child

This research was directed by the following questions:

1. What empirical evidence is there for a connection between singing and creativity and wellbeing?
2. On the basis of the available evidence, should the Creative Ireland Programme support the resourcing of a national youth singing project?
3. If the answer to 2 is yes, what would such a project look like in order to have maximum impact on the creativity and wellbeing of children and young people?

A wide-ranging consultation process was undertaken which explored interest and support for a national youth singing project and the creative processes grounded in singing. Consultation included members of the choral singing sector, the music sector, the music education sector as well as those working in arts and education more generally. There is compelling evidence regarding the capacity for singing to be physiologically, mentally and cognitively beneficial and to enhance creativity and cultural awareness among children and young people. Beyond this, however, is the impact which a national youth singing project could have on Ireland's young people and the ability of such a project to knit into the Irish educational landscape in a meaningful way. Singing is uniquely placed as a realistic vessel by which significant impact for substantial numbers of young people with a potential for vast and transformative change can be achieved through engagement in school and community settings. In short, every child should experience singing through Creative Ireland.

Creation of an all-embracing singing project that lives vibrantly both in and outside of Ireland's classrooms will produce a wonderfully inclusive cross-pollination within and between formal and non-formal settings, with communities sharing song and singing in artistic, imaginative and creative experiences. Group singing connects people, performance connects singers with audiences and workforce development connects locally-based teachers, artists, and cultural organisations, with an emphasis on digital connectivity.

The value of a choir within a local community is significant, reaching beyond the school community. Its external impact resonates through performances in concert, social and community settings. The choir provides a sense of cultural identity and place within a community. It also instils in the participants and listeners a knowledge and understanding of heritage and place. Welsh (2012) highlighted the creation of enhanced sense of social inclusion which engenders feelings of community belonging as a significant benefit of such activity.

A national youth singing project would aim to get Ireland's children singing. A singing culture can be established through regular, sustained engagement on multiple levels by every child – singing for singing's sake and in performance, as well as accessing music education and the

entire primary curriculum through singing as a pedagogical tool. Singing promotes creativity, wellbeing, Art and voice through the powerfully transformative medium of song in our schools and communities. The potential for richly enhancing cross-curricular delivery of history, culture, language and heritage of one's own country and others, general and musical literacy, community spirit and wellbeing through the medium of group singing is enormous.

A national youth singing project would empower teachers to lead group singing and utilise singing as a pedagogical tool, resulting in delivery of curriculum in a way that will enhance and capitalise upon existing music education infrastructure including state and philanthropic funding to Music Generation, and mainstreams cultural creativity for every child in every school in every community.

Helen Doyle
22 March 2019

Section 1: Summary Findings and Key Recommendations

- The evidence for a connection between singing and creativity and wellbeing is strong and compelling, particularly when singing is experienced as a group activity.
- A national youth singing project can mainstream cultural and creative experiences, build audiences and expand access to creative opportunities through the medium of group singing in and across school and community settings.
- The main recommendation of this report is that Creative Ireland commit resources to a national youth singing project. A national youth singing project can provide ‘practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music ... by 2022’ for every child through the medium of group singing.¹
- A national youth singing project can deliver Action 9 of the Creative Youth Plan which requires development of ‘a strategy to develop and extend choral singing’.²
- A national youth singing project can contribute to delivery of Actions 4, 5 and 6 of the Creative Youth Plan which centre around development and mainstreaming of CPD projects.
- A national youth singing project can build upon current investment with a project that extends and complements the work of Creative Schools, Creative Clusters and Creative Youth Partnerships, and other Creative Ireland projects.
- A *Cruinniú na nAmhrán* or a *Cruinniú Canta* could extend Creative Ireland’s annual large-scale, visible celebration and promotion of children and young people’s participation in culture in the vein of *Cruinniú na nÓg* through the medium of group singing.
- The voice is a universal instrument that every child can develop from birth. There are no significant barriers to access the playing of this universal instrument and group singing is a lifelong, intergenerational, ubiquitous activity that connects people.
- Group singing engenders true community spirit, thus mainstreaming wellbeing and creativity through cultural participation. It also aids development of inter-personal communication, individual identity and self-esteem.
- Irish and International evidence strongly supports the benefits of group singing; Welsh (2012), Moss (2017), Clift *et al* (2010), Jaschke *et al* (2018) and Johnson (2007)

¹ (2016) *Creative Ireland Programme*. Dublin: Creative Ireland.

² (2017) *Creative Youth Plan*. Dublin: Creative Ireland.

identify increased social connectedness, benefits to mental health, improved psychological wellbeing, enhanced cognitive abilities and improved academic achievement.

- Provision of access for every child requires a strategy for the augmentation and enhancement of current practice and provision for youth singing in Ireland. This report identifies three main spheres of engagement for consideration – engagement by every child, engagement by leaders and engagement by arts and education organisations with a national youth singing project.
- Leaders of group singing should have opportunities to connect with and develop their own voice and vocal skills through access to modelling and performance pathways via CPD structures.
- The primary school classroom is fundamentally important to sustainable augmentation and enhancement of singing for every child.
- The primary school classroom is acknowledged as an already-crowded environment regarding policy implementation obligations. A newly-imagined singing project would provide innovative policy delivery pathways for teachers.
- Timely consideration must be given to planning for secondary school engagement. Children should emerge from primary school into an environment which values group singing as an integral part of school life.
- When integrated to formal education, a national youth singing project can support the delivery of Department of Education and Skills (DES) policy objectives in the areas of digital strategy, inclusion, disadvantage, transitions and engagement with *An Ghaeilge*.
- The DES has a crucial role as an advocate for every child in every school to participate actively in a national youth singing project.
- Extension of the Teacher Artist Partnership (TAP) Scheme with singing as the primary focus is strongly recommended.
- A Singing Schools programme which places quality engagement with singing and song at the very heart of every child's school day should be developed in partnership with The Arts Council, Creative Ireland and DES, its design informed by similar models of whole-school engagement.
- A singing culture will be established through regular, sustained engagement on multiple levels by every child – singing for singing's sake and in performance, as well as accessing music education and the entire primary curriculum through singing as a pedagogical tool.

- A complementary and equivalent Singing Communities programme should be developed for engagement by groups in non-formal settings.
- Engagement with Irish repertoire heightens cultural awareness for every child. Engagement with singing *as Gaeilge* can augment teaching and learning of *An Ghaeilge*, taking every child far beyond their classroom setting into an informal educational space.
- Currently there is no mechanism connecting youth singing activity in formal and non-formal settings and there are few connecting mechanisms for activity within each setting.
- Mechanisms must be developed to bring formal and non-formal singing practice together. A partnership approach is strongly recommended, underpinned by practical collaborative methodologies, to ensure access for every child to singing experiences founded on shared expertise and avoidance of duplication.
- ‘Sing Spaces’ or dedicated physical sites for singing activity should be established. Activity in such sites would engage children, leaders and arts and education organisations within and across all settings.
- A national youth singing project should itself be developed as a model for inclusion through creativity and the arts, recognising that cultural change, large-scale immigration and other local and global factors have the potential to create social tensions.
- The Irish Youth Choir (IYC) should be expanded to include an Irish Youth Children’s Choir (IYChC), with it being extended to regional and county children’s choirs in the longer term. The activity of IYChC would sit exclusively within the non-formal sector.
- Excellence is evidenced in youth singing practice, but the experience of every child is widely varied. It is recommended that youth singing activity be mapped during an Action Research Phase.
- A national youth singing project should be co-designed with young people and with the wider group singing community.
- The development of youth singing practice should be led from within by ambassadors of existing best-practice exemplars in school and community settings, practitioners and educators whose skill and expertise can inspire and contribute to augmentation and enhancement of practice across all settings.³

³ Models of engagement explored in Section 3 are The National Children’s Choir, The Irish Youth Choir, Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath, The Cross Border Orchestra of Ireland Peace Proms, Aspiro and Dublin Youth Choir.

- Continuous Professional Development (CPD) will serve to truly embed creative practice in school and community settings. It is recommended that a national youth singing project conceive reciprocal, shared CPD structures for group singing leaders which combine collaborative input from artists, choral experts and educators.
- Networks of shared CPD will create regional communities of learning and practice, which further strengthens establishment of a robustly integrated national approach to youth singing development.
- Universal access to existing high-quality digital resources to aid augmentation and enhancement of classroom singing practice, performance outlets and levels of voice-led cross-curricular delivery is recommended.
- Simultaneously, digital resources specific to the Irish education context should be generated, most particularly around school-based singing and Irish language development.
- Exploration of singing and technology is recommended.
- Greater access for every child to singing experiences through a national youth singing project will require an augmented workforce of artists, leaders and musicians within the youth singing sector working with arts and education organisations.

Section 2: Why Singing for Ireland's Youth?

Why Singing?

A considerable body of research and international practice powerfully supports the case that access to tuition, experience and participation in music unlocks a young person's creative capabilities. While both an activity and an art form, singing is also the most effective introduction to instrumental music education and provides a gateway towards creative self-expression. Singing is also increasingly recognised as an important pedagogical tool for creative learning in subjects other than music.

Singing is a whole-body activity which engages multiple senses synchronously, namely physiological, cognitive and mental. Personal, social and cultural experiences are accessed by singers, they utilise cognitive systems, powers of recall and emotional senses but singers also engage their sense of hearing, sight and movement – virtually the full gamut of human senses is engaged when singing. It is not altogether surprising, therefore, that benefits of such activity are similarly wide-ranging and far-reaching. The value-added benefits of group singing involvement are evidenced-based in Psychology, Neuroscience, Medical Science and Cultural Studies, both nationally and internationally.

Research has demonstrated positive effects on psychological wellbeing, health issues or disability and loneliness. Benefits to cognitive ability and improved academic outcomes for children engaged in singing and instrumental tuition are also evidenced. Singing can access curriculum areas beyond music and can, therefore, make a substantial contribution to the general education and development of every young person, as well as a young person's contribution to society.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a triennial international survey, evaluates education systems by testing knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds. It has become a powerful global driver of education reform and will include creativity in its standardised testing from 2021, a recognition of creativity and critical thinking skills as essential elements of successful modern economies. Research to develop a tool to measure creativity is ongoing. Inclusion of arts pedagogies creates conditions of the high-functioning classroom; this improves educational achievement and encourages learners and leaders of learning to be inquisitive, inventive and imaginative – true exponents of 21st century education.

International models demonstrate that mass engagement through singing can be achieved; 96% of primary schools in England engaged with the Sing Up programme during a four-year state-funded period up to 2011. Ireland can provide a similar gateway for teachers to lead group singing. The Sing Up programme embraces flexibility and progression for schools in its awards programme, promotes community involvement through the annual National Singing Day, offers a complementary suite of CPD opportunities and is built around a comprehensive and supportive online resource.

The evidence base for group singing in Psychology, Neuroscience, Medical Science and Cultural Studies.

- There are multiple benefits for young people that derive from group singing, including increased individual sense of self-worth and creativity as well as significantly enhanced cognitive abilities. Students engaged in quality music programmes have consistently better outcomes, scoring at least 20% higher in reading and maths standardised tests (Johnson, 2007).
- Singing does not have barriers to access given that any young person who can vocalise can use their voice to sing.
- The voice is a 'universal instrument' and one which we can play.
- The voice has a capacity to instantly communicate feelings, stories, thoughts and passions.
- Group singing is connection; singers connect directly with one another and their school community, creating something larger than the self. Singers align breath and musical intention, assume collective responsibility and strive to meet common goals.
- Singers connect with a multiplicity of languages, customs and stories, bringing children far beyond classroom walls.
- Group singing aids development of inter-personal communication, individual identity and self-esteem. It engenders true community spirit, thus mainstreaming wellbeing and creativity through cultural participation. Professor Graham Welsh highlights psychological benefits of such activity in *The Benefits of Singing for Children* (2012).
- Engagement with music can play a role in societal cohesion generally, through personal growth and identity for citizens.
- Academic performance and attendance was significantly enhanced through inclusion of creative arts in an under-performing UK school, but similarly emotional and social development was also boosted throughout the school community.⁴ The assertion that children who study music tend to have larger vocabularies and more advanced reading skills than students who do not take music lessons is also borne out in this case with student progress rising to the top 10% nationally.
- Group singing is reported to have a transcendent effect on those involved, its effects both life-affirming and spiritually uplifting, in research published by Dr Hilary Moss (2017). Moss examined benefits to health and wellbeing of group singing, with

⁴ Brown, J. (2017). Derelict school becomes national leader by making a surprising subject compulsory. Retrieved from <https://ideapod.com/derelict-school-becomes-national-leader-making-making-surprising-subject-compulsory/>

increased social connectedness, respiratory improvements, cognitive stimulation, fun and mental health benefits all reported as valuable by-products.⁵

- Research by Clift *et al* (2010) examines the relationship between choral singing and psychological wellbeing with respondents reporting positive effects of choral singing on quality of life in the areas of psychological wellbeing, depression (clinical and reactive), self-esteem, bereavement, significant health issues or disability and loneliness.⁶

Policy Alignment - how youth singing can engage in Ireland's existing education structures

Augmentation and enhancement of youth singing practice nationally in formal educational settings can complement and enrich Ireland's educational landscape. Song-singing and song-making promote inclusion, international awareness and cultural empathy. Universal access to group singing programmes built on flexible, adaptable pathways would aid transitions to Junior Cycle for children and teachers. Engagement with singing develops the universal instrument for potential use in Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate Music studies by every child. Singing *as Gaeilge* encourages cultural promotion, cultural awareness and is a vehicle for language learning and advancement. Group singing is a life-long, intergenerational learning activity. Development of a national youth singing project has the potential to generate a pioneering model for CPD, reflection on learning and digital infrastructure engagement by teachers and leaders of group singing. Development of a national youth singing project demands a cross-sectoral working approach. Significant areas of policy alignment are noted here:

- *Creative Ireland* (2016): Provision of access to a national youth singing project aligns with policy priorities and the overarching wellbeing objective of the Creative Ireland Programme. Access to a national youth singing project also delivers 'practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music ... by 2022' for every child.
- *Creative Youth Plan* (2017): Development of a national youth singing project delivers Action Point 9 of the Creative Youth Plan which requires development and extension of choral singing for Ireland's young people.
- *Culture 2025* (2016): Societal enrichment through engagement with the cultural life of the nation and recognition of the importance of culture to a vibrant society aligns with delivery of youth singing programmes in Ireland's schools and communities.
- *20 Year Strategy for The Irish Language* (2010): A national youth singing project can prioritise song-singing *as Gaeilge* and aligns with the strategy to mainstream the Irish language and cultural heritage through advancement of new and existing repertoire of and from Ireland.

⁵ Moss, H. (2017) *Sing yourself better*. Limerick: Irish world Academy of Music and Drama.

⁶ Clift, S., Hancox, G., Morrisson, I. Hess, B., Kreutz, G & Stewart, D. (2010) *choral singing and psychological well-being: Quantitative and qualitative findings from English choirs in a cross-national survey*. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*. 1. 10.1386/jaah.1.1.19/1.

- *The Action Plan for Education* (2018): Provision of access to a national youth singing project aligns with policy objectives in inclusion, lifelong learning, use of enhancing digital technologies as well as disadvantage and transitions through provision of universal access to music education within a nationwide Singing Schools programme available to every child in every school.
- *Digital Strategy for Schools* (2015): Delivery of group singing structures which are supported and enhanced by a digital resource is in line with policy priorities in this area. Digital infrastructure is a means for collaborative learning, practice, performance and composition.
- *Making Great Art Work* (2016): Provision of access to a national youth singing project aligns with the priority areas of this strategy namely: The Artist, Public Engagement, Investment Strategy, Spatial and Demographic Planning and Developing Capacity. Creative Schools is noteworthy.
- *Raising Your Voice, Towards a Policy for the Development of Choral Music in Ireland* (2008): Provision of access to a national youth singing project aligns with recommendations to address identified gaps in music education provision, to promote specialist vocal musician engagement with schools and to develop community-based youth singing practice.
- *Cosán, Framework for Teachers' Learning* (2016): Development and delivery of CPD structures within a national youth singing project aligns with *Cosán* values and principles which espouse engagement with continued professional development and learning by teachers.

Section 3: The Practice of Youth Singing

Youth Singing in Ireland

Sing Ireland (SI) supports and promotes choral music in Ireland and their experience, expertise and mandate in the choral singing sector is clear. SI has a renewed focus on the development of youth singing practice nationally. Their current strategic plan identifies youth singing development as a policy priority and SI is well placed to advance a partnership process which realises an enduring, sustainable model for youth singing activity in Ireland. SI's Board of Directors includes a dedicated Youth Representative and a Youth Sub-Committee Group, whose work to date has included the convening of national youth choral meetings as well as production of support materials for singing in Irish primary schools. As evidenced throughout this consultation and research process, there is a sector-wide appetite for focused development around youth singing. The evidence points to a desire by many to promote youth singing for its inherent value but also to bind it to Ireland's wide-ranging promotion and celebration of Irish culture; the Decade of Centenaries, the recent *Bliain na Gaeilge* (2018), *Cruinniú na Cásca* (2017), *Cruinniú na nÓg* (2018) and the upcoming 2019 *Cruinniú na nÓg*, in addition to advocacy for wellbeing and inclusion in schools all represent significant vehicles for developing youth singing nationally.

The landscape of youth singing in Ireland is widely varied and, therefore, the experience of every child is not equal. The opportunity for every child to access youth singing activity in their school or community is wholly dependent on individual schools, teachers, community group leaders and geographical factors, amongst many other elements.

There is general acknowledgment and a research basis that points towards the paucity of youth group singing activity in Ireland, both in and out of the classroom, despite the sustained effort of many inspirational conductors and teachers around the country. The most significant public report undertaken in the area was *Raising Your Voice, Towards a Policy for the Development of Choral Music in Ireland* (The Arts Council of Ireland, 2008). It points to the need for a transformational shift in the development of youth singing which, in turn, requires significant investment.

Recommended requirements as outlined in that report remain unfulfilled: "Formal music training for pre-school teachers, increased prioritisation within the formal system, a higher profile for group singing in teacher education. A need for choral specialists to support in-school group singing development. Support for development of youth community group singing activity. The limited range of training opportunities at third level to be addressed, as well as limited opportunities for community choral conductor CPD. Recommendation to widen range of choral repertoire...commissioning to bridge the existent gap."

A national youth singing project aligns with recommendations of *Raising Your Voice* to address identified gaps in music education provision in the state school system as well as seeing specialist vocal musician engagement with schools and the development of community-based youth singing practice.

Excellent practice is evidenced in primary school and community youth singing but quality singing experiences are not currently accessible for every child or, indeed, simply do not exist for every child.

Ireland's 1999 Primary Arts Education Curriculum, "enables children to creatively express ideas, feelings and experiences through music, drama and the visual arts."⁷ Multiple arts education aims are achievable through group singing, with reference particularly to the three interrelated music curriculum strands - Listening & Responding, Performing and Composing; these aims include creative problem solving, enjoyment in creative expression and appreciation of arts from global to local perspectives, old and new.

A confidence deficit exists for some generalist teachers in delivery of singing and voice-led delivery of the primary school music curriculum. A practice of teacher-swaps in music is prevalent in many schools, identifying an expert within the school staff who delivers the music curriculum to multiple class groups. This practice serves to silo expertise within school communities; a national youth singing project could promote such ambassadors through pioneering co-teaching models which promote peer-to-peer skill transfer between practising teachers within their own classrooms and school communities. Learning to sing and singing to learn, i.e. cultivating performance underpinned by curricular requirements through singing will promote developmental engagement with music for teachers and children in primary schools.

Ireland's existing performance outlet infrastructure includes a wealth of well-established competitive and non-competitive platforms countrywide. These include, for example, a multiplicity of choral festivals and *feiseanna* nationally, the *Córfhéile*, Laudate, Peace Proms and Hallelujah, to name but a few.

Current models of youth singing engagement in Ireland to draw upon

Children in Ireland in formal and non-formal settings engage with existing performance outlet infrastructure throughout the country. Best practice is acknowledged and evidenced in competitive and non-competitive performance platforms countrywide. Children participate in choral festivals and *feiseanna* nationally, under the direction of teachers and leaders of group singing. Access to and availability of such experiences to every child is widely varied.

The National Children's Choir (NCC) works with approximately 8,500 primary school children and 500 teachers biennially. NCC structures encompass high-level leadership, teacher education, CPD, vocal modelling and performance pathways within a long-standing operational framework. NCC leadership embodies best practice in the field of school-based singing, i.e. they are both primary school practitioners and choral experts. NCC is an exemplar for group singing in primary schools; NCC has been effective in delivery, engaging over 160,000 children since its inception over thirty years ago, and can be scaled up to benefit more schools, teachers and children. NCC design and delivery could directly foster a learning to sing and singing to learn approach in elements of its work, cultivating performance which is explicitly linked to primary school curricular music requirements. NCC resources are

⁷ NCCA (1999). *Primary School Curriculum*. Dublin: Government of Ireland Publications.

produced biennially; these could potentially be developed and housed within a digital resource which supports a national youth singing project, contributing to both new music and newly imagined classroom-appropriate resources which facilitate accessible teacher engagement through technology.

The Irish Youth Choir (IYC) is Ireland's dedicated national youth choir. IYC offers training opportunities for singers and conductors aged fourteen to twenty-eight and comprises three groups - IYC, Irish Youth Chamber Choir (IYCC) and Irish Youth Training Choir (IYTC). All three choirs engage with expert tutors and vocal coaches under an internationally renowned Artistic Director with intensive rehearsal courses which culminate in performance.

Music Generation (MG) is Ireland's National Music Education Programme. Since 2010, many MG areas around the country have been developing choral and singing programmes in their work to grow opportunities for children and young people to access performance music education. To support this, MG National Development Office and Sing Ireland (SI) worked in partnership to create professional development opportunities designed to support and up-skill musicians delivering these programmes. Building on this, and with financial support from the Arts Council/Music Generation Partnership, SI and Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath (MGOW) were able to further this work and since 2015 they have collaborated on Singfest, a choral music residency that supports and enhances the vocal programmes currently being delivered by musicians across the counties of Offaly & Westmeath. Working in a range of educational and community settings across the midlands, MGOW musicians work with over 3,500 children and young people annually through their singing-based programmes. Preparation for the Singfest Big Sing Days is integrated into the weekly performance music education sessions led by artists and vocal coaches throughout the academic year. The annual Singfest residency culminates in a multi-day event that brings hundreds of young people together in 'Big Sing' style workshops and performance.

Cross Border Orchestra of Ireland (CBOI) Peace Proms is freely available to primary school choirs of all levels of experience. The programme culminates in large-scale performances by participating schools with the Cross-Border Orchestra of Ireland, a youth symphony orchestra. The programme promotes "peace through music" and almost 30,000 children from Ireland, North and South, and the UK have engaged with it to date. The programme includes access to prescribed material, a workshop with the CBOI Peace Proms conductor and the concert itself where up to 4,000 children combine to perform as a single choir.

Aspiro engages children in high-quality community-based choral programmes which incorporate new and challenging repertoire and aim to contribute to the development of local and national audiences. Aspiro seeks to nurture, develop and invest in children's innate musical ability and facilitate the development of the whole person through choral experiences of excellence.

Dublin Youth Choir (DYC) is an equitable, choral music education initiative, external to school structures and not affiliated with religious institutions. DYC singers engage in a musicianship programme which embraces Kodaly principles. DYC aims to provide choral music education which engages young singers across a broad repertoire base, emphasising Irish choral compositions.

- NCC conductors are advocates and models of practice for schools nationally. NCC's operating model is significant for a national youth singing project as it is led by teachers within the formal education system.
- A national youth singing project can enhance and extend IYC with the establishment of an Irish Youth Children's Choir (IYChC) as first steps engagement by children with IYC, bridging the demographic gap.
- MGOW has increased participation levels in singing at primary and secondary level through focused programmes of activity which are linked across the region.
- CBOI Peace Proms brings children together in performance on a large scale and promotes engagement by schools with shared repertoire, a model of interest in development of both performance outlets and CPD structures for a national youth singing project.
- The five values that drive Aspiro are noteworthy in the development of a national youth singing project; the core values embrace the young artist, high artistic standards, inclusion, value to the community and long-term sustainability.
- A regional youth choir presence is key to a national youth singing project and would act as a meaningful pathway of progression for future IYC members and beyond. The obligation by all members of IYC to sing in their school choirs is admirable and can act as a catalyst for increased school-based singing, which is noteworthy for a national youth singing project.

International models of youth singing engagement to draw upon

A national youth singing project must ensure awareness of best international practice which achieves mass engagement through singing. International practice around promotion of singing in primary-aged children offers valuable insight for a national youth singing project to stimulate, boost and inspire such activity in Ireland.

- **Sing Up** promotes daily, quality engagement with singing by placing singing at the core of learning within a school community, supported by an online tool-kit of support for teachers leading group singing in their classrooms. A hugely significant model promoting transformative activity for every child in the formal sector through a national youth singing project.
- **'Open Schools'** demonstrates a pathway for children engaged in school-based youth singing activity to connect outward with community-based activity through a national programme.
- **'Train the Trainer'** represents a unique opportunity for a national youth singing project to pioneer a co-teaching model which promotes peer-to-peer skill transfer between practising teachers within their own classrooms.

- **'Music: Count Us In'** demonstrates inclusive, mass-scale school-based singing which is nationally networked. It offers developmental participation pathways for students, supportive resources and training for teachers and promotes whole-school engagement.

England's Sing Up is a gateway for teachers to facilitate group singing at a level appropriate to their competence and confidence level. The online resource provides vocal modelling echo tracks, accompaniment tracks and part-singing tracks, sheet music scores, detailed lesson plans, teaching notes and indicative enhancing cross-curricular pathways through themes and topics at multiple levels of challenge. The Singing Schools Awards programme is flexible and progressive. It raises the profile of singing within the school community and outward through potential inter-school collaboration, parental and community involvement. Outward-looking engagement is also promoted through the annual National Sing Up day. The comprehensive and supportive nature of Sing Up as a facilitative and intuitive classroom resource for teachers leading group singing in their classrooms tackles competence and confidence issues for generalist teachers as informed by the *Raising Your Voice* report. Significantly, 96 % of English primary schools engaged with Sing Up during the initial state-funded period, those that did not were already highly engaged in singing.

Denmark's 'Open Schools' initiative reconnects schools with communities and integrates local sports clubs, cultural centres or other groups into the fabric of schools' work. Collaborations between schools, community music groups and music schools are forged, with many longstanding partnerships continuing to connect schools with their communities.

The Netherlands 'train the trainer' approach of the privately-funded *123Zing* programme presents a useful model for workforce development with CPD at the heart of delivery engendering longevity, development and legacy.

Australia's largest school initiative, Music: Count Us In, is state-funded and takes a partnership approach to supporting music education in schools across the entire country. It is internationally recognised as the world's largest school music initiative. The National Celebration Day is a significant event in the Australian school calendar with over half a million students synchronously performing the annual 'Program Song' around the country.

Section 4: Why Singing for Creative Ireland?

As previously noted, there are multiple benefits for young people involved in group singing – these include positive effects on young people’s mental health, wellbeing and self-esteem as well as the provision of an education beyond the classroom boundary through engagement with the stories, customs and languages of both our own country and beyond. A national youth singing project would enhance school communities and challenge every child to achieve beyond their expectations in areas which may previously have been unexplored by them.

Group singing can enable Creative Ireland to deliver a core objective of Pillar 1 of the Creative Ireland Programme: that every child in Ireland will have ‘practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music ... by 2022’.⁸ A national youth singing project can also act a key delivery mechanism for the group singing initiative for children and young people required by Action 9 of Creative Youth – the Pillar 1 Action Plan published in December 2017. One of 18 Actions of the Creative Youth Plan proposes that Creative Ireland ‘will work with key partners to develop a programme aimed at encouraging creative and sustainable engagement with singing and choral music for young people. The strategy will be developed in 2018 and rolled out in 2019’.⁹

Young people’s understanding of the importance of culture and creativity in the arts can be enhanced by increased opportunities to engage with group singing programmes in formal and non-formal settings. This would also serve to build audiences and widen the access of as many people as possible to creative and cultural experiences.

Additional Actions of the Creative Youth plan, namely Action 4, Action 5 and Action 6 are centred on development and mainstreaming of CPD projects. These target early years, primary schools and post-primary schools and mechanisms to deliver these actions can be contained within a national youth singing project with CPD at its heart. Provision of enhanced and augmented CPD structures also serves to complement the work of Creative Clusters and Creative Schools. Networks of shared CPD will create regional communities of learning and practice, which would further strengthen the establishment of a robustly integrated national approach to youth singing development.

The projected reach of a universal group singing project with access for all, under a national project to include secondary schools, is 1 million children. Adoption of a cohesive approach which merges the formal and non-formal sector, resultant engagement will be greater. The numbers that can currently be quantified, however, are those registered in primary and secondary schools, namely 898,930 (DES, 2016/17). Large-scale access and mass engagement for children can be enabled by Creative Ireland through the medium of group singing, utilising the universal instrument of every child. A long-term strategic project which augments and enhances current practice will require expansion of existing structures through

⁸ (2016) *Creative Ireland Programme*. Dublin: Creative Ireland.

⁹ (2017) *Creative Youth Plan*. Dublin: Creative Ireland.

Creative Ireland and development of original structures which build upon and complement that practice.

Singing is a mind and body technique, without barrier to access, that is universally accessible by every community. Every one of us can sing. Indeed, our first learnings and communications as pre-linguistic infants are via the highly musical, sing-song language of 'Motherese' or baby-talk, built upon repetition and exaggerated speech melody. Creative Ireland can provide enhanced opportunities for creativity and cultural experience through singing from pre-school children right through the continuum of life-long learners into primary, post-primary and beyond, through singing programmes. Singing is considered the most effective introduction to instrumental music education and engagement with singing, therefore, potentially opens multiple creative pathways for every child to pursue. Singing is creative; making performance using the voice provides gateways to the highly creative act of curricular and extra-curricular composition for every child. In connecting technology as a compositional tool, various areas of potential challenge for every child and teacher can be readily addressed and the potential for creative outputs in classrooms, community settings and Creative Hubs is significant.

Singing is the least expensive and most easily accessed form of musical education. Inclusivity is, therefore, uniquely facilitated by singing and vocal practice. A national youth singing project which embraces elementary and experiential singing practice alongside enhanced singing and musical skills development in a broadly-based project would be inclusive of every child and young person in Ireland, whatever their ability, background or skill level.

Development of a national youth singing project aligns with the overarching wellbeing objective of the Creative Ireland Programme: enhancing creativity and cultural awareness, and contributing to the physiological, mental, cognitive and social wellbeing of our young people through singing. A national youth singing project would be inclusive of every child and young person in Ireland. A national youth singing project would work across the formal and non-formal education sectors and would contribute to delivery of the school curriculum. A national youth singing project would develop the national infrastructure to resource increased access to participation through workforce development.

Because a national youth singing project is also a community-based project it has direct relevance to Pillar 2 of the Creative Ireland Programme (Creativity in our Communities). The Local Authorities, the Education Training Boards, the proposed Local Creative Youth Partnerships as well as community-based music initiatives such as Music Generation all have substantial roles to play in its delivery. Development of a national youth singing project demands a cross-sectoral working approach, can build upon significant prior investment and would be founded upon collaboration at every level from the ground up. The ability of Creative Ireland to bring people together through the medium of group singing is enormous – children, families, communities, artists and educators.

A national youth singing project intended to be based in Creative Hubs would, therefore, be relevant to the development of a key element of Pillar 3 of the Creative Ireland Programme (Creative and Cultural Infrastructure). Creative Ireland in Kerry has included the development

of creative hubs and incubation spaces at key locations across the county and this represents a model of significant interest regarding inclusion of ‘Sing Spaces’.

A *Cruinniú na nAmhrán* or a *Cruinniú Canta* could extend Creative Ireland’s annual large-scale, visible celebration and promotion of children and young people’s participation in culture in the vein of *Cruinniú na nÓg* through the medium of group singing.

The overarching expected long-term impact of activity by Creative Ireland in this sphere would be to place Ireland at the forefront of youth singing delivery worldwide through a national movement for youth group singing with universal access, with large numbers of young people engaged in a quality developmental group singing experience.

A significantly transformative difference to youth singing in Ireland can be enabled by development of a national youth singing project and for those young people engaged with it.

A national youth singing project should be innovative, respond to international experience within the Irish context and treat singing as a truly creative endeavour, one which richly enhances and adds value to a young person’s experience.

Workforce development should be founded upon shared activity between artists, teachers, Music Generation/MEP tutors and community leaders to cultivate and maximise collaborative links and outputs between formal and non-formal settings.

A national youth singing project can contribute to delivery of the school curriculum in music as well as in other subjects (with a focus on the Irish language) and will empower teachers to lead group singing and utilise singing as a pedagogical tool, resulting in the mainstreaming of cultural creativity from every classroom to entire schools to entire communities.

If the Creative Ireland undertaking to ‘Enable the Creative Potential of Every Child in the State’ is to be made real, singing is uniquely placed as a realistic vessel by which significant impact upon substantial numbers of young people, with a potential for vast and transformative change can be achieved. The potential reach of a national youth singing project translates into over 500,000 young people at primary school level in the coming years and the natural progression of such an initiative to pre-school, secondary and third level equates to engagement by 1,000,000 young people.¹⁰ Such a project would be pioneering, placing Ireland at the forefront of youth singing delivery worldwide. An innovative, emergent approach which responds to international experience within the Irish context and treats singing as a truly creative endeavour would transform and add value to the experience of every child within and across communities.

¹⁰ It should be noted that these figures assume full engagement across all education settings following an Action Research Phase which would, in turn, inform planning for long-term, multi-stage roll-out of a national youth singing project.

Section 5: Every Child, Every Leader and Arts and Education Organisation

This report explores potential for engagement by every child with group singing from two perspectives - how every child learns to sing and how group singing can stimulate a sing to learn culture in every classroom.

This section attempts to describe a set of guiding principles drawn from consumers of group singing, practice and policy that would underpin a framework for augmentation and enhancement of youth singing in Ireland. The framework will be built upon a Singing Schools programme, a Singing Communities programme and structures of professional development pathways which connect group singing activity for children, leaders and arts and education organisations.

Learning to Sing and Singing to Learn

A national youth singing project must deliver extrinsic rewards to stimulate children's intrinsic love of group singing and, simultaneously, deliver pathways of engagement which are progressive and developmental. A Singing Schools programme must be founded on these principles and can deliver upon curricular requirements for music and other subjects. Equivalent principles will guide a complementary Singing Communities programme for non-formal sector engagement.

The Voice of the Child

Small-scale focus groups of children engaged in voluntary extra-curricular singing groups and of children engaged in non-voluntary classroom-based singing were undertaken seeking initial insight to the voice of the child for this research.

- Children highly rated the opportunity to make new friends and share experiences through group singing activities.
- Children highlighted mental benefits, indicating that the feel-good factor during and after rehearsal was uplifting.
- Children noted the positively inclusive role of group singing in enhancing their school environment.
- Children reported high levels of enjoyment and satisfaction as confidence in their ability to achieve common goals rose and discernible progress was made.
- Children particularly enjoyed group singing activities which brought them into contact with singing spaces and singers from other schools.

It is recommended that further, more detailed consultation be undertaken in this area to ensure that a national youth singing project will be in place that has been co-designed with young people.

The Voice of the Leader/ Teacher

Small-scale CPD sessions were undertaken seeking initial insight to the voice of the teacher for this research.¹¹

- Teachers wanted to engage with group singing and to lead it in such a way that is appropriate and healthy for developing young voices.
- Teachers valued engagement with song-making and song-singing as meaningful pathways to sacraments or equivalent events in the school calendar.
- Teachers highly rated access to demonstration lessons by artists and teacher experts.
- Teachers rated cross-curricular approaches which incorporated singing.
- Teachers believed they could share their acquired knowledge and increased skills with colleagues in their school communities.
- Teachers believed that current teacher-swaps represent an opportunity around development of onsite co-teaching practices.
- Teachers valued reflection on practice.
- Teachers highly rated communities of practice which provide opportunities to share learnings, observe demonstrations, reflect collectively and to plan collaboratively.

It is recommended that further consultation be undertaken in this area to ensure that a national youth singing project will be in place that has been co-designed with the leaders of youth singing activity.

The Voice of Arts and Education Organisations

Extensive sectoral consultation was undertaken seeking initial insight to the voice of arts and education organisations for this research. A national youth singing project must develop and implement a partnership approach with practical collaborative methodologies to ensure shared expertise and avoidance of duplication. Among the key partners committed to the development of a national youth singing project are the following:

- Youth Choirs and Conductors:
A national meeting was held during this consultation phase at the National Concert Hall, Dublin on 29th April 2018 where many youth choir conductors expressed strong support for the national youth singing project initiative.
- Irish Youth Choir (IYC):
The IYC will provide important pathways for development of a national youth singing project. IYC's strategic plans include establishment of a regional and provincial choir network. This will provide progression pathways to complement the work of a national youth singing project.
- Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT):
JCT is a dedicated service for teachers and schools which provides CPD and resources to support schools in their implementation of the new Framework for Junior Cycle (2015). Given JCT's existing work with Sing Ireland and the Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO) in the development of teacher/musician partnerships centred around the new Junior Cycle for Music specification, an enlarged project for teachers

¹¹ It should be noted that participating teachers had chosen to undertake these CPD sessions.

and students in 1st Year music classes in the Action Research Phase would be a noteworthy pathway for a national youth singing project at post-primary level.

- **The National Children's Choir (NCC):**
NCC is an important feature of Irish youth group singing and comprises 8,500 young people every two years. NCC is led by teachers in the formal education system who are eager to act as advocates and models of practice for schools nationally.
- **Music Generation (MG) and local MEPs:**
MG and local MEPs are a key structural resource that will work with a national youth singing project to further growth in performance and artists' engagement. Investment and sustained development of Music Generation since 2009 presents a fortuitous opportunity for collaborative outputs.
- **Creative Schools (CS):**
Group singing is an area of interest for The Arts Council in CS, a programme which will see artists working in schools countrywide. CS will also incorporate cluster networks which will provide opportunities to develop an integrated approach to group singing. A national youth singing project is well-placed to benefit from CS structures and to enhance the work of CS.
- **Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST):**
PDST provides professional learning opportunities and supports to teachers and school leaders across both primary and post-primary sectors. PDST is a significant avenue by which a national youth singing project would engage with teachers during an Action Research Phase and beyond.
- **Chamber Choir Ireland (CCI), Contemporary Music Centre (CMC) and *Anúna*:**
CCI, CMC and *Anúna*, amongst many other arts organisations and groups have expertise and knowledge, including experience working in schools and educational settings, that will give a professional artists' perspective on youth singing practice.
- ***RTÉ Cór na nÓg*:**
RTÉ Cór na nÓg can advocate for the development of links to schools and to connect with the national broadcaster's remit to the work of schools.
- **DES Inspectorate and Arts in Education Charter:**
Enhancement and augmentation of youth singing practice in formal and non-formal settings would positively impact upon engagement by children with curricular and extra-curricular music education. Development of a national 'play the voice' approach to music education curriculum delivery with repertoire and skills honed through pilot actions and research in ITE settings would enable teachers to engage with song-singing and song-making linked to academic demands of the music curriculum.
- **Initial Teacher Education Colleges/Institutions (ITE):**
ITE Colleges and Institutions have agreed informally to include work on a national youth singing project in their training for their students in teacher education.

- The Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM):
The RIAM is a leading institution in Ireland in the development of eLearning platforms. This can complement a national youth singing project's digital resources and RIAM has committed to ensure optimal alignment of the two platforms. The RIAM's external assessment systems are of interest to a national youth singing project and their extensive regional network will contribute to formation of communities of practice for youth singing activity.
- Technological University (TU) Dublin, Conservatory of Music and Drama:
TU Dublin's Grangegorman Campus will house the entire TU Dublin network of Schools by 2020, representing an inter- and multi-disciplinary research platform valuable to a national youth singing project during an Action Research Phase. TU Dublin are becoming a Digital Campus and plan expansion of CPD modules. TU Dublin and SI have an existing agreement of supply as a linked provider through the Annual Summer Conducting Course, all of which will contribute to CPD pathways for a national youth singing project.
- *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCE)*:
CCE is currently engaged in raising awareness of singing within its own organisation. A national youth singing project and CCE are well-placed to be of mutual benefit in furthering traditional Irish singing in English and *as Gaeilge*. CCE has a far-reaching national network which will contribute to creation of national networks of engagement for a national youth singing project. A broader aim of encouraging civic engagement and volunteerism will be examined in this work with a commitment from CCE to engage on this.
- The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA):
A national youth singing project will endeavour to promote singing in GAA club settings and to encourage a broadly-based use of the collective voice at sporting events. Other possibilities for engagement with the GAA will be explored, particularly in the context of the organisation's expressed desire to extend its range of creative activities for young people.

Founding Principles of a Framework for Singing Schools

1. Song-singing and Song-making with teachers and artists
2. Teachers and artists in partnership
3. Singing to learn
4. Intra-school and Inter-school singing activity
5. Community singing activity
6. Tiered engagement
7. CPD activity for teachers and artists
8. Annual Singing Week
9. National Days of Action
10. Sing Spaces

The Impact of these principles on every child in every classroom in every school – what might Singing Schools look like?

1. Song-singing and Song-making with teachers and artists

- Children will expect song-singing to be present in their school.
- Children will sing regularly with teachers and artists.
- Children will *Drop Everything and Sing* using digital technologies.
- Children will create repertoire in collaboration with teachers and artists.
- Children will participate in Singing Workshops led by visiting experts.
- Children will engage with the primary school music curriculum through singing.

2. Teachers and artists in partnership

- Teachers and artists will generate reciprocal relationships promoting skill transfer using collaborative co-teaching models.
- Teacher competence and confidence levels as leaders of group singing would increase.
- Artists' ability to discharge effectively and confidently in an educational and/or community setting with young people will increase.
- Teachers and artists will create communities of learning and practice through shared experiences.
- Teachers and artists will forge relationships within and across formal and non-formal sectors.

3. Singing to learn

- Children can learn music through singing – curricular skill acquisition, developmental objectives and academic requirements all learned through vocal musical experiences.
- Children will learn heritage, history and language, most particularly *An Ghaeilge*, through song-singing and song-making.
- Children can access the entire curriculum through singing, introduction of arts pedagogies into cross-curricular delivery serves to strengthen all associated subjects.
- STEAM education places Creative Arts at the centre of innovative and creative learning which fosters creative learners and critical thinkers.
- Children will leave primary school as experienced singers, supported by a working knowledge of the primary school music curriculum delivered through singing, and with equal access to Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate Music as they progress through the education system.

4. Intra-school and Inter-school singing activity

- Children will experience inclusion and community building, leadership and whole-school engagement through a buddy system connecting children as mentors.
- Children will engage in performance throughout the school year to mark events of significance in the school calendar.
- Children will connect with other schools in communities of practice through shared singing activities, including youth singing workshops and collaborative national youth singing project performances.
- Children will access the current performance infrastructure in greater numbers.
- Children will access non-formal sector singing groups in greater numbers.

5. Community singing activity

- A Singing Communities programme will provide a framework for augmentation and enhancement of current practice.
- Community singing activity will be impacted upon by increased participation in the formal sector through a national youth singing project.
- Community singing will be linked with formal sector singing through collaborative performance, shared CPD opportunities and networks of learning and practice.
- IYChC would be accessible to both school and community-based singers due to placement of its programme of work during holiday periods, such as Easter and Summer breaks from school.
- Clear pathways of connection outwards from schools into the wider community will be established.

6. Tiered engagement

- Formal and non-formal engagement with a national youth singing project will be nationally networked but locally informed and adapted.
- A national youth singing project will be accessible at multiple levels of challenge and experience to provide performance pathways built upon a continuum of development for every child.
- A national youth singing project will be accessible at multiple levels of challenge and experience to provide pathways built upon a continuum of development for every leader of youth singing.
- Singing Schools and Communities programmes will include external assessments, which are incremental, developmental and ensure engagement with quality repertoire.
- Mapping of existing performance infrastructure will identify indicative levels of challenge for youth singing activities, thereby promoting engagement pathways appropriate to each child and leader.

7. CPD activity for teachers and artists

- CPD design and delivery will be accessible and responsive to all leaders of group singing.
- CPD design and delivery will complement existing structures while simultaneously pioneering new opportunities for teachers' learning through engagement with a national youth singing project.
- Models of in-school CPD, regionally networked CPD and eLearning platforms will be explored by a national youth singing project, as well as mechanisms to acknowledge continued engagement with education and upskilling by teachers.
- A national youth singing project will champion the promotion of current and emerging ambassadors of singing within and across schools and communities.
- Leaders will access high-level choral modelling through CPD structures.

8. Annual Singing Week

- An annual Singing Schools week which is nationally linked will heighten awareness and encourage deep, whole-school engagement. This could potentially be a Creative Ireland-led *Cruinniú Canta* initiative.
- A Singing Schools week will encourage deep, whole-school engagement.
- Artists will take up residencies in Singing Schools during annual Singing Schools week.
- Singing Schools will autonomously plan Singing Week activities guided by criteria for participation.
- Sing Spaces in Creative Hubs will lead multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary creative weeks for Singing Schools.

9. National Days of Action

- Schools and communities can be mobilised by calls to action.
- A National Singing Day would link formal and non-formal engagement across a single national day of action or during a week-long campaign.
- Inter-generational participation and learning, as well as a heightened sense of community identity and wellbeing would be promoted.
- Widespread awareness of the benefits of group singing would be generated throughout the community.
- School participation in a National Day could act as a target objective for a Singing Schools programme or provide an accessible way-in to the programme.

10. Sing Spaces

- Sing Spaces in Creative Hubs will act as a conduit for formal and non-formal singing practice and CPD opportunities.
- Sing Spaces will promote diversity of activity and cross-pollination between children, leaders and arts and education organisations.
- Sing Spaces will allow children to directly occupy a creative space where the art of making performance happens on all levels, from scratch to professional.
- Virtual Sing Spaces can be enabled using technology, reducing limitations of collaborative practice.
- Sing Spaces will house regional branches of the Irish Youth Choir and Irish Youth Training Choir, extended to include the Irish Youth Children's Choir.

Section 6: Framework for Development of a National Youth Singing Project

A National Youth Singing Project for Ireland

- An exploratory and innovative project design. A wholly new approach, informed by extensive sectoral consultation and drawing on international models, should be taken. No data currently exists to support the success of such a project in the Irish context; a national youth singing project is necessitated by the existent gap in this sector and Creative Ireland can address this gap through a national youth singing project.
- Mapping of youth singing activity is of paramount importance. Informed by the mapping process, Creative Ireland can connect and extend current youth singing activity. A mechanism for such joined-up thinking does not exist. A national youth singing project is the required mechanism to capitalise upon existent practice and to augment it in a way that is meaningful, avoids duplication and adds value to the experience of every child.
- Action research is imperative to building a successful operating framework for a national youth singing project. The development of an Irish research basis in youth singing is critical to informing a national youth singing project.
- A national youth singing project will provide outlets and systematic structures of creative engagement for children with Creative Ireland. A nationwide Singing Schools programme along with a complementary Singing Communities programme should be developed. Such programmes would centre around music-making by children as well as the making of new music by children.
- Systematic structures of engagement with a national youth singing project for leaders of group singing and arts and education organisations can be developed. Mapping of current provision is required. National infrastructure can connect and extend activity between stakeholders embracing a bottom-up rather than top-down approach. Shared CPD programmes promoting workforce development of educators, artists and cultural organisations will extend and augment current practice. The creative capacity of every child in every school and community can be built through a ‘train the trainer’ approach.
- A Sing Space would act as a conduit for formal and non-formal engagement with singing. A Sing Space is dedicated to singing processes and outputs within a Creative Hub. This brings children to a physical space and places their learning at the heart of hands-on, onsite experiences. A Sing Space is also a place of learning and practice for teachers, artists and arts and education organisations. Sing Spaces in local hubs can model the formation of Creative Ireland’s Creative Hubs. This creative environment harnesses multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary engagement.

Who leads? To whom or to what entity falls the task of leading and delivering a national youth singing project? The task is multi-faceted and complex, involving a range of artistic and management skills and strong, supportive governance and oversight.

Management and Governance

Given SI's mandate, expertise and experience in the group singing sector, a national youth singing project should initially and subject to review be managed by SI under a Service Level Agreement with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It is worth noting that SI is currently engaged in a strategy shift which has seen its mandate broaden to include all forms of group and collective singing.

A project management group will be formed. It is recommended that the management group meet bi-monthly and it will comprise SI, Creative Ireland, the Department of Education and Skills, The Department of Children and Youth Affairs/ National Youth Council of Ireland, the Royal Irish Academy of Music, Music Generation, the Arts Council as well as representatives from the local authority and teacher education sectors. An indicative list would include Cork School of Music (Cork Institute of Technology), Dublin City University, TU Dublin Conservatory of Music and Drama, Hibernia College, Mary Immaculate College, Royal Irish Academy of Music, Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, University of Limerick, Waterford Institute of Technology. Creative Ireland will appoint a liaison person who will work with the project on a continuous basis.

An Expert Advisory Group comprising relevant national and international expertise (meeting four times per year initially) will be appointed to provide high level guidance to management of a national youth singing project.

A phased delivery for a national youth singing project beginning with an Action Research Phase is strongly recommended. Early focus should be on formal sector activity in order that singing advocacy and practice in schools take root. A broader focus will subsequently include the non-formal sector in a whole community project approach.

First Implementation Steps

The recommendation of this report is that a national youth singing project be developed and delivered in phases, broadly as outlined below. First Implementation Steps are necessarily somewhat fluid and should be informed by the findings of an initial Action Research Phase. It is imperative that the principles underlying these First Implementation Steps are clearly understood and adopted by the key development stakeholders.

Phase 1: Create project management and governance structures.

Phase 2: Delivery of an Action Research Phase to include pilot Singing Schools Programme.

Phase 3: Roll out of Singing Schools Programme nationally.

Phase 4: Development and delivery of mechanisms which link formal and non-formal group singing activity.

Phase 5: Develop strategies and mechanisms to include secondary school settings in a national youth singing project.

Among the key, short-term implementation steps which follow creation of management and governance structures are:

- Appoint the Director of Youth Singing Programmes and Administrator.
- Establish two Action Research project sites in 2019.
- Select project sites using criteria including: geographic location, stage of development and local singing infrastructure.
- Appoint two part-time regional youth singing co-ordinators.
- Map youth singing activity in project sites.
- Establish 'Sing Spaces', physical sites for singing that bring young people into the community in local hubs that will model the formation of Creative Ireland's Creative Hubs more generally.
- Pilot creative multi-disciplinary work with young people, using models developed by Fighting Words, Code Club etc.
- Identify and appoint ambassadors for youth singing from within the teaching and singing practitioner community to act as advocates and local champions of the programme.
- Pilot CPD programmes with PDST and JCT as part of the Action Research Phase.
- Pilot youth singing projects in Initial Teacher Education to inspire the next generation of teachers to include singing in their teaching methodologies.
- Develop Irish-specific digital singing resources.
- Create an evaluation brief and contract a developmental process evaluator to support and document learning through an Action Research Phase. A sophisticated evaluative framework is required to support practitioner and partner reflection, to capture top-down and bottom-up outcomes and learnings and provide a high-level overview of outcomes and impact across the sites.
- Develop a Singing Schools programme for schools throughout Ireland in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills and the Creative Ireland Programme.
- Build an artistic team to deliver a national youth singing project that embodies high quality vocal leadership and a mixed methodology/stylistic approach.

This is not a complete plan; further work is required to determine the optimum feasible development sequencing.

It is vitally important that Phase 1 gets underway at the earliest possible moment, both for its own sake and to give momentum to the larger programme of activity that is envisaged for a national youth singing project.

It should be noted, therefore, that what is presented here is in the nature of a Master-Plan; much detailed work remains to be done, which could have an impact on sequencing and could alter the suggested implementation phasing. It is vital that national youth singing project management should refine this plan, in the broader context of long-term project objectives, as soon as possible. A planning conference with all interested parties, supported by the appropriate professional expertise will be the most effective way to begin.

Section 7: Funding a National Singing Project

A national youth singing project represents an opportunity to begin building a research base within the Irish context for the benefits of singing through a robust Action Research Phase and beyond.

Funding sources for a national youth singing project should include national and local government, and philanthropy.

A national youth singing project is founded upon collaboration and uniquely occupies both an arts education and, synchronously, an arts-in-education space. Funding sources in the medium to long term should reflect this partnership approach.

Funding should include support from arts, heritage, community and education sources generally, as well as health, given that a national youth singing project will address outcomes in these areas through song-singing and song-making. A modest financial contribution, depending on school size, may be made by participating schools.

- This research proposes an initial Action Research Phase focused on primary school age children with nationwide roll-out in 2021-2022. The funding for both an Action Research Phase and the later nationwide roll out will be centred on resources, human resources and digital resources.
- The success of a national youth singing project lies in a well-resourced artistic and administrative workforce which is, in turn, supported and advanced by a high-quality digital resource.
- An artistic workforce would include conductors, CPD facilitators, musicians, tutors, composers; an artistic team that embodies high quality vocal leadership and a mixed methodology/stylistic approach to group singing practice.
- An administrative workforce would include a Project Director, co-ordinator positions for the selected areas of action research, administrative staff and research staff.
- A funding allocation to gather data on the learnings through delivery, centred in ITE settings, is vital to longevity and legacy, as well as ensuring that best possible approaches are being harnessed, embraced and rolled out.
- A digital resource of the highest possible quality should be available to schools at the earliest possible time. In the absence of a cadre of trained professionals, which may take years to develop, a universally available digital resource provides a realistic opportunity to up-skill practice and give teachers the tools to provide basic singing experience from which both they and their pupils can then progress.

The following international models should be examined in the context of funding streams for consideration in the medium to long-term for a national youth singing project:

Community Funding Streams:

Singing Playgrounds (UK) originated through community funding streams. It is a whole-school approach to singing play which incorporates teacher education, leadership training for children as well as a wide range of supporting resources and activities all of which foster teamwork and leadership through singing.

Action Research Programme:

Musical Futures (UK) commenced as an action research programme in 2008 and was subsequently established as an independent not-for-profit organisation in 2017.

Significant Government Investment:

Sing Up (England) was borne out of significant government investment over a four-year period which resulted in a 96% uptake by state primary schools during the period of state supported activity. Beyond the funded period, Sing Up has become a Limited Company, a self-sustaining model funded through earned income and philanthropy which has continued to build its own legacy. The Sing Up Foundation was launched in 2017.

Denmark invested heavily in digital learning technologies between 2012 and 2017, and there is a well-funded national cultural policy, the value upon which is reflected in the provision of arts education integral to numerous levels of education.

Private Investment:

The JEKISS programme (Germany), *Jedem Kind seine Stimme* or “Every child, his/her voice”, is one of many privately launched initiatives to enhance children’s singing. It incorporates music in school children’s daily life with a special focus on the collaboration between schools and music schools. Through the training of all school teachers, not just the music teachers, children are singing daily and not just within children’s choirs.

The Netherlands *123Zing* programme is privately funded and takes a ‘train the trainer’, thus it presents a useful model for workforce development with CPD at the heart of delivery engendering longevity, development and legacy.

There is a robust case for private investment to support a national youth singing project. A varied income portfolio will be required to enable transformational change for every child. Reciprocal and interdependent relationships between state and philanthropic funding maximise impact for singing programmes worldwide and a co-funding model will generate increased impact and clear success for a national youth singing project.

Section 8: A Long-Term Self-Sustaining Strategy for Youth Singing and Creative Ireland

The primary school classroom is crucial to sustainability for a national youth singing project and for delivery of a core objective of Pillar 1 of the Creative Ireland Programme: that every child in Ireland will have ‘practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music ... by 2022’.

Engagement by the formal sector, including secondary school in the longer term, with a national youth singing project is the delivery mechanism for the group singing initiative for children and young people required by Action 9 of Creative Youth – the Pillar 1 Action Plan published in December 2017.

An Action Research Phase focused on primary school activity will inform planning for development of a robust and pedagogically sound Singing Schools programme.

The case for Singing Schools is strong

Whole-school engagement models such as Green Schools and Active Schools as well as the Healthy Schools initiative all generate community and agency around the chosen area of focus. Children, teachers, parents and principals along with the wider local community can become involved in the focus area, thus embedding that area and creating a cultural shift to normalise regular, quality and sustainable engagement with it.

Research undertaken in design of the Teacher-Artist Partnership (TAP) model highlights the need for whole-school support of such endeavours, that long-term collaborative relationships are more beneficial, and that third level institutions and other course providers can aid the professional relationship of reciprocity between artists and teacher with relationship building of paramount importance.

Criteria should be designed to shape the singing journey of a school as they work towards becoming a Singing School. Long-term sustainability for school engagement with a national youth singing project is fundamental to embedding a singing culture in schools and should be central to such project design.

- Singing Schools must deliver extrinsic rewards to stimulate children’s intrinsic love of group singing and, simultaneously, deliver pathways of engagement which are progressive and developmental.
- Singing Schools structures which act as a vehicle for CPD and targeted education opportunities for pre-service and practising teachers.
- Singing Schools structures which champion digital infrastructure as a vehicle for collaborative learning, practice and performance at all levels.

- Singing Schools structures which promote collaboration in planning and practice.
- Singing Schools structures which take ‘train the trainer’ approaches centred around regular CPD and peer-to-peer learning networks.
- Singing Schools structures which champion best-practice ambassadors through co-teaching models promoting partnership between teachers and artists, as well as generalist teachers and music teachers.
- Singing Schools structures which connect local and regional school communities.
- Singing Schools structures which promote connections outwards from school communities to their local communities.
- Singing Schools structures which create meaningful pathways to sacraments or equivalent school calendar events.

Promoting sustainable engagement between formal and non-formal settings

There is untold scope for shared activity and output between children in formal and non-formal settings, most particularly in group singing performance. Such actions would undoubtedly embrace diversity, creativity, partnership, sustainability and progression for all involved. A shared artistic workforce delivering national youth singing projects such as Singing Schools, CPD opportunities and community-based group singing is key to providing the necessary conditions for cross-pollination for youth singing in Ireland.

Reciprocal relationships between artists and leaders of group singing in both formal and non-formal settings as well as the creation of networks of learning and practice are vitally important to sustained and developmental engagement with a national youth singing project.

It is crucially important that all performance engagement be locally informed and adapted i.e. bespoke in nature for leaders and children, and it must be accessible at multiple levels of challenge and experience to provide performance pathways built upon a continuum of development.

Conclusion – Give Voice to our Young People

- The evidence for a connection between singing and creativity and wellbeing is strong and compelling, particularly when singing is experienced as a group activity.
- Singing is uniquely placed to deliver the Creative Ireland undertaking to ‘Enable the Creative Potential of Every Child in the State’.
- Creative Ireland can provide practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music for every child by 2022 through the medium of group singing. A national youth singing project can mainstream cultural and creative experiences, build audiences and expand access to creative opportunities in and across school and community settings.
- A national youth singing project will enhance and augment group singing practice nationally, impacting upon substantial numbers of children and young people.
- Such a project would be pioneering, placing Ireland at the forefront of youth singing delivery worldwide. An innovative, emergent approach which responds to international experience within the Irish context and treats singing as a truly creative endeavour would transform and add value to the experience of every child within and across communities.
- Creative Ireland can build upon existing investment by developing a project which sits comfortably within the space that exists around institutions, artists, teachers and children, complementing and expanding current structures, outputs and expertise.
- A national youth singing project can contribute to delivery of the school curriculum in music as well as in other subjects (with a focus on the Irish language) and will empower teachers to lead group singing and utilise singing as a pedagogical tool, resulting in the mainstreaming of cultural creativity from every classroom to entire schools to entire communities.

Appendix

Additional Creative Pathway Case Studies - Appendix of Creative Education Models of Engagement, incorporating transferable whole-school, multi-disciplinary and group singing-focused approaches.

30 Days Wild (UK): First run in 2015, 30 Days Wild was a month-long nature challenge which aimed to prove the significance of sustained, focused engagement on nature. 18,500 participants undertook daily random acts of “wildness” generating reciprocal relationships of benefit to nature and those engaging with it. Participants were surveyed about their interactions with nature, their health and happiness before the study, at the end and two months after the study concluded. Most notably, the numbers reporting their health to be “excellent” rose by 30% and connection to nature and active nature behaviours were sustained long after the study had finished. **A useful model, easily transferable to a 30-Day Sing or six-week engagement with singing activities by schools which would serve to embed and normalise singing in schools. Potential to be a target objective for a Singing Schools programme, acting as a useful springboard into the programme.** <http://www.mywildlife.org.uk/30-days-wild/>

Active Music Digital (UK): UK-based web delivery of primary school music curriculum through provision of lesson plans which are skill-based. Each downloadable lesson plan is supported with DVD tracks, video streaming, scores, teaching resources and an online community of learning and practice. There is an annual subscription service which offers many different levels of support and access to a range of resources. They aim to help teachers to deliver the music curriculum aided by intuitive videos and lesson plans to increase teacher confidence levels around music-teaching. **The level of teacher support through video-modelling is hugely advantageous in this digital resource for building generalist teacher confidence in the delivery of a primary music curriculum.** <http://activemusicdigital.co.uk/>

Active Schools: Aiming to encourage ‘more schools to be more active, more often’, Active Schools is a whole-school engagement model which is a DES initiative, supported by Healthy Ireland. Schools subject current provision in their school community to self-evaluation, after which schools focus on achieving success criteria as laid out by the Active Schools programme. Two obligatory activities are the organising of an annual Active School Week as well as inclusion of an Active School area on the school website detailing their outputs and work undertaken. Upon successful completion of the programme, a school is awarded an Active School Flag which is valid for three years, after which schools can reapply. **The Active Schools programme is a useful model, much of which could potentially transfer to build a**

model of whole-school engagement for a Singing Schools equivalent. The model would benefit from a dedicated support team, a robust teacher education aspect and the creation of networks between school communities involved in Active Schools. The visibility of Active School Weeks and promotion of school activities on their websites are particularly appealing aspects. <http://activeschoolflag.ie/index.php/active-schools/>

Airfield Estate: Airfield Estate is a recreational and educational charitable organisation which aims to reconnect people with the processes of food production on its working farm and estate. Airfield offers a wide-ranging, hands-on education programme which embraces *Aistear* principles and both primary and post-primary curricula and is child-centred. They also offer teacher education programmes, including DES approved summer courses, which are founded upon the same child-centred, curriculum-linked principles. **This model brings children to a physical space dedicated to the subject at hand and places their learning at the heart of hands-on, onsite experiences. A space dedicated to singing processes and outputs, i.e. a Sing Space, sends powerful messages to those who engage with it and it could act as a conduit between formal and non-formal engagement with the same subject in the manner that Airfield Estate does.** <http://www.airfield.ie/>

Aspiro: Aspiro is a non-auditioned, community-based children's choir which provides a holistic progression pathway for both boys and girls of primary age upwards. This youth choir currently comprises three different groups and has been in existence for twenty-one years. Aspiro engages children in choral programmes of beginning, intermediate and advanced levels which incorporate new and challenging repertoire, are of high quality and aim to contribute the development of local and national audiences. Aspiro describe their mission as follows: to nurture, develop and invest in the innate musical ability and artistry of children and young people and facilitate the development of the whole person through extraordinary choral music experiences, which push the boundaries of excellence in choral music. **The five values that drive Aspiro are noteworthy in the development of a national youth singing project; the core values embrace the young artist, high artistic standards, inclusion, value to the community and long-term sustainability.** <http://www.aspirochoir.ie/>

Cara Awards: The RIAM Cara Awards is an evaluation programme which encourages goal-setting by musicians and singers and was developed as a response to increased school-based and group instrumental tuition. The system incorporates solo and group performance, as well as technical and musicianship requirements, and it aims to embrace a very broad and diverse range of genres. Cara Awards are accessible to a multitude of group learning settings including primary and post primary schools, music schools, bands, youth clubs and school completion programmes. **The diverse and flexible nature of design embraced across this programme is a strength which speaks to both inclusion and level-appropriate attainment that a national youth singing project can draw upon. Further to this, the use of supportive**

technologies for accompaniment, i.e. backing tracks, ensures accessible participation. <http://www.riam.ie/examinations/riam-cara-awards-group-syllabus/>

CBOI Peace Proms: Peace Proms is freely available to primary school choirs of all levels of experience and is targeted towards eight to twelve-year olds. Schools register on an annual basis to access music resources, engagement with which culminates in large-scale performances by the participating schools with the Cross-Border Orchestra of Ireland, a youth symphony orchestra, in venues around the island of Ireland and a concert in Liverpool. The is designed to promote “peace through music” and almost 30,000 children from Ireland, North and South, and the UK have engaged with the programme. The programme includes access to prescribed material which is then prepared by the schools, a workshop with Peace Proms conductor and the concert itself where up to 4,000 children combine to perform as a single choir. **Large-scale performance opportunities such as these are an interesting model for a national youth singing project to pursue.** <http://peaceproms.com/>

Ceol Ireland: *Ceol* Ireland is a curriculum-based pre-school and primary music programme, which embraces Aistear guidelines and is designed for delivery by non-expert teachers and those with musical experience. *Ceol* Ireland was developed in 1998 to address needs pertaining to training and confidence in primary teachers as well as time constraints for classroom curriculum delivery, thus providing a means to return to a more vibrant music education as experienced by the programme’s designers in the 1950s and 1960s. The single purchase resources comprise weekly, structured and scripted lesson plans and teaching resources for use on whiteboards as well as a CPD element which is delivered through video-modelling in DVD format. They previously offered summer courses in conjunction with the INTO. **Involvement of teachers at every stage of project design, a design which is accessible by practitioners of varying experience levels and the piloting of all material are useful learnings to take from the Ceol Ireland programme.** <http://www.ceolireland.ie/>

ChoirsCan: ChoirsCan is an open-access online collection of eight traditional Irish-language songs which have been arranged for three-part and four-part choirs presented as song packs. Each song pack contains sheet music, pronunciation guide, a recorded performance of the arrangement and additional recordings which isolate each voice-part, acting as a teaching and learning tool for singers. The modelling here addresses both vocal modelling and language pronunciation, thus creating an accessible resource irrespective of experience in both areas. The songs are all from the 1975 *Cás Amhrán* collection, a much-used primary school resource, and these modern arrangements are targeted towards post-primary or non-professional choirs. **This re-voicing of Irish songs as *Gaeilge* in modern, high-quality voice-appropriate arrangements delivered online with supporting technologies demonstrates the universal access that such a resource can potentially provide.** <http://www.choirscan.com/>

Coder Dojo: Coder Dojo is a global network of programming clubs run for the community by the community. Led by volunteers, Coder Dojo provides the opportunity for any child between the ages of seven and seventeen learn how to code, build websites, create games or apps and explore technology through informal learning in community-based settings. Coding ninjas create their own progression pathway and expertise emerges from within to lead inside an informal, creative and social environment. In line with the high-functioning classroom, learning is self-directed, led by the learners themselves thus eliminating the need for a computing expert to lead the session, learners create something new and unique in each project and the activities promote learning which is challenge-based. **Learners access activities at the most suitable level for them, all the time aiming to use technology to create, musical outputs in the case of a national youth singing project, rather than merely consume.** <http://Coderdojo.com>

Code Club: Code Club is part of Coder Dojo but represents a more classroom-oriented and teacher-facilitated approach. Code Club is hugely popular in the UK and they are currently growing their presence in Ireland. Code Club resources are specially created, open access and aimed at nine to thirteen-year olds. The projects are completely intuitive, gradually introducing coding concepts and knowledge incrementally; teachers can choose to experience projects for the first time with their learners or be a page ahead, if they wish, and each project has a finished product, created within the single session. **As learners grow in experience, projects and products become more extended and advanced with possibility for teacher-led group work at all stages of engagement. Sonic Pi, a new kind of musical instrument, designed for creating sounds with code, represents an exciting creative tool which could potentially harness the voice and coding to provide another creative pathway for 21st century learners.** <http://Codeclub.org.uk>

Competitive Festivals: There are a multitude of festivals which include or focus exclusively upon choir competitions. Such competitive platforms take place annually right around the country and include, amongst others, Arklow Music Festival, Cork International Choral Festival, *Feis Ceoil*, Interschools Music Festival, Limerick Choral Festival, Mayo International Choral Festival, Navan Choral Festival, Sligo International Choral Festival and The Kilkenny Music Festival, for example. **Each festival has a unique set of requirements and rules which govern their competitions and group singing leaders would be best-placed to elect whether their group would participate in a competitive festival, such as those outlined above.**

Córfheile: Voluntary, non-profit organisations, *Córfheile* Cork and Dublin were founded in 1947 and 1967 respectively, with the common aims of providing a non-competitive festival for multiple activities which include song, music, drama and dance. Over 7,000 primary school children are involved annually in the celebratory performances which engender a

sense of achievement, co-operation and enjoyment while performing in front of a large audience. **A non-competitive performance platform is inclusive and encourages large-scale participation, acknowledging the contribution of each school group without a ranking system.** There is an authentic sense of performance and achievement for those involved and an emphasis on inclusion of Irish-language repertoire for choral groups, both of which are noteworthy for a national youth singing project. <http://www.corfheile.ie/>

Community Games Choirs: The Community Games was founded in 1967, currently operates in twenty-eight counties and is accessible by children from six to sixteen years of age in individual and team events. There is a broad range of activities which includes a multitude of sporting categories as well as a culture and arts section. Choir is a team event at area, county and national levels and falls under the philosophy which underpins all Community Games activities, that of child-centred participation which encourages friendly, fun and healthy rivalry. **The acknowledgement of choir as a team activity is a valuable message for those that engage with group singing in schools and communities.** Supportive technologies such as the use of backing tracks are permitted and remove potential barriers to participation by groups in that regard. <https://www.communitygames.ie/choir.html>

Dabledoo: Dabledoo Music is an annual subscription service which aims to deliver the full primary music curriculum through provision of online resources, online teacher support and training, weekly lesson plans and schemes of work. Dabledoo takes a child-centred approach and encourages hands-on, creative learning experiences in early years settings and primary schools. Dabledoo also offers teacher summer courses and engages teachers regularly through frequent email updates, regular addition of new content and follow-up contact with subscribers. **Continued engagement with teachers which is supportive and developmental is key to a national youth singing project.** ‘Classroom Concerts’ which are recorded in schools and shared online as an educational resource bring musicians and artists a step closer to the classroom, a national youth singing project can learn from such engagement of technologies to address potential disconnect between classroom music and live music performance for children. <https://dabledoomusic.com/>

Dublin Youth Choir: Dublin Youth Choir is an auditioned, community-based choir which currently comprises five choirs for singers from 2nd class to 18 years of age. They describe themselves as providers of an equitable, choral music education initiative which is external to school structures and not affiliated with religious institution. Dublin Youth Choir embraces Kodaly music education principles and singers engage in a musicianship programme. Founded in 2017, Dublin Youth Choir aims to provide choral music education for the Dublin region which engages young singers across a broad repertoire base, emphasising Irish choral compositions. **A regional youth choir presence is key to a national youth singing project and would act as a meaningful pathway of progression for future IYC members and beyond.** The obligation by all members of this community-based youth choir to sing in their school choirs is

admirable and can act as a catalyst for increased school-based singing, which is noteworthy for a national youth singing project. <http://www.dublinyouthchoir.com/>

Dumbworld: Brian Irvine, a composer and conductor, and John McIllduff, a writer, director and filmmaker, established Dumbworld in 2009, which describes itself as an artist led creative production company. Dumbworld takes a multi-disciplinary approach which centres around music, words and imagery. Irvine and McIllduff's work focusses on 'making performance' and they have worked on large-scale bodies of work which involve children and professional musicians at all stages along the journey of creating performance, with each group bringing something unique to the process. **Dumbworld's large-scale creative process transfers easily to single classroom settings, as well as in a 'train the trainer' environment. Brian Irvine is a Visiting Professor in QUB's Music Department, a practice which should be explored further by a national youth singing project in creating pathways of access to practising artists.** <http://www.dumbworld.co.uk/>

Fighting Words: Fighting Words is a free resource which engages children in the creative process of writing and story-telling. A network of 500 volunteers facilitate Fighting Words programmes in nine regional centres nationwide and 90,000 children have accessed Fighting Words since its inception nine years ago. They aim to present children with an opportunity which may not have otherwise presented itself to them in the form of a stimulating, participative, collaborative workshop, after which they leave this dedicated writing space as published authors. **Fighting Words is officially linked with DCU's creative writing programme, an interesting model for a national youth singing project. Further to this is the wealth of potential links between creative writing processes and compositional outputs for a national youth singing project in partnership with Fighting Words. Fighting Words has produced screenplays, theatre scripts, songs and a musical which illustrates the myriad of possibilities which should be explored by a national youth singing project. The dedicated space in which this creative process takes place is also of interest in the context of a national youth singing project and Sing Spaces housed within Creative Hubs.** <http://www.fightingwords.ie/>

Laudate: Laudate is run by the Archdiocese of Dublin as part of Catholic Schools Week; in 2018, 2,500 children were involved in the programme. Laudate encourages schools to engage with a shared repertoire of hymns which form the basis for shared celebration during Catholic Schools Week with a coming together of children and families in performance on three evenings in three Dublin churches. Participating school and parish representatives engaged in workshops on the prescribed materials, after which they prepared the repertoire with the classes before coming together in song. **Engagement by schools with a common repertoire provides a strong foundation for shared CPD and performance opportunities, as demonstrated by this model. Shared repertoire also provides a useful opportunity to gather data for a national youth singing project on the experiences of practitioners which would inform future planning.** <http://www.dublindiocese.ie/catholic-schools-week-2018/>

National Days of Action/ National Events: Calls to action for schools and communities can mobilise both formal and non-formal joint engagement in the chosen activity of focus across a single national day of action or during a week-long campaign. Useful models for such activity include *Cruinniú na nÓg*, National Walk to School Week, Positive Aging Week, National Pyjama Day, Outdoor Classroom Day, World Mental Health Day and UN Universal Children's Day, for example. **Undertaking a large-scale involvement by children, parents, grandparents, teachers, employers, employees i.e. entire communities, generates widespread awareness throughout the community and encourages inter-generational participation and learning, as well as a heightened sense of community identity and wellbeing. School participation could again potentially be a target objective for a national Singing Schools programme and an equally accessible way-in to the programme.**

Séinn na nÓg: *Seinn na nÓg*, in operation since 2014, is run by the Diocese of Killaloe, County Clare and aims to promote the participation of children in church services throughout the year. It is an online resource for primary schools in the Killaloe Diocese which houses classroom teaching resources for traditional Irish tunes and songs in sheet music and audio recording formats. The project describes itself as being unique in its mission to bring music, song and dance into Church setting through the medium of Irish traditional music under an over-arching concern for enrichment of the lives and spiritual wellbeing of the children involved. An annual concert demonstrates the work undertaken by children in their primary school settings throughout the year. It is a complimentary support to *Alive-O*, a Catholic primary school religious education programme, which includes song-singing. **There is support available throughout the year to all primary school teachers engaged with *Seinn na nÓg* which, coupled with accessible, online supports designed to assist teachers with the teaching and learning of required materials for their annual concert, are noteworthy for a national youth singing project.** <https://www.seinnanog.com/>

Sue Furlong Music: Sue Furlong was an award-winning Irish composer and song-writer whose output features *D'Aon Guth* 1,2 & 3, a singing resource intended for use with the primary school Irish curriculum from Junior Infant level upwards which aims to develop children's musical and linguistic skills. Each level includes teaching notes, photocopiable pupil resource pages and recordings of performance tracks and backing tracks to support classroom teachers' delivery of the material. Furlong's choral music is available for purchase online; **her output is diverse in style and caters for singers of all ages and levels of experience, accompaniment tracks are available for a lot of her work and there is an emphasis on original songs as *Gaeilge* as well as accessible arrangements of Irish traditional songs. The design and delivery of online teaching aids enhance song-singing both in Irish and English in the classroom and are accessible to generalist teachers.** <http://www.suefurlongmusic.ie/>

The Voices Foundation (UK): The Voices Foundation focuses on the delivery of curricular music through singing. This is delivered through the Inside Music programme, two high-quality publications, which contain supporting CDs, weekly lesson plans and schemes of work. A number of fee-paying CPD opportunities are offered throughout the year which cater for teachers' needs and experience at three different levels. **In-school support is also available should schools choose to engage with this area of the programme; it ranges from visits by Voices Foundation music leader on six days per term for whole-school CPD as well as engaging in classroom-based co-teaching and modelling sessions, designed to enhance teachers' skills in delivering the music curriculum through singing.** The availability of CPD which targets varying levels of teacher experience in this model is also noteworthy for a national youth singing project. <http://www.voices.org.uk/>

Tradtime: Tradtime describes itself as an initiative which promotes the teaching and understanding of traditional Irish music, song and dance around the country. It is a monthly subscription service which provides tin whistle, banjo and flute lessons for novice to advanced standard players, delivered through a combination of innovative whiteboard technology and classroom tutors. Tradtime is linked to *Comhlta Ceoltóirí Éireann* and endeavours to invigorate Irish music for those that engage with the initiative. **It is designed for classroom delivery with software which utilises a rolling sheet music score in a play-a-long mode. Engagement is designed to improve literacy, the ability to play to a click-track and tracks are accessible at slow, medium and fast speeds to cater for varying degrees of players competence and confidence.** <https://tradtime.ie/>

Young Voices (UK): Young Voices is a programme of work undertaken in schools for the period of one term which culminates in participation by school choirs in large-scale arena concerts wherein up to 8,000 children combine in performance as a single choir entity. Schools pay an annual registration fee which allows access to CPD workshops for teachers engaging with the prescribed repertoire, membership of an online community of learning for teachers involved with Young Voices and supportive technology resources such as backing tracks, vocal tracks, choreography video modelling and online sing-a-long resources and online choreography tutorials. **All of these are supported by Young Voices staff and the repertoire that children engage with is designed to explore some curricular links. The online network for teacher encourages a transfer of knowledge and skills between teachers of lesser and greater experience levels. Large-scale performance opportunities such as these are an interesting model for a national youth singing project to pursue with the caveat that performance must be the product of developmental work undertaken by the singers, rather than the work itself.** <https://www.youngvoices.co.uk/>