



**SUPPORTING AND
CHAMPIONING
LEISURE-TIME MUSIC**

Making Music
The National Federation of Music Societies
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The Duchess of Kent *Patron*
Debbie Wiseman OBE *President*

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA,
Minister for Communities,
Department for Communities
The Northern Ireland Executive
Stormont Castle
Stormont Estate
BELFAST BT4 3TT

20 July 2020

Dear Minister,

We are writing to ask you as a matter of urgency that **when you issue guidance on the re-opening of the performing arts you allow amateurs to resume musical activity following the same guidelines as professionals.**

Our data suggest there are around 430 music groups in Northern Ireland; with 24,000 amateur participants. These are adult leisure-time groups; if you count church and school choirs and ensembles as well, you could easily add another 850 groups and another 40,000 people.

All of these people (including participants in national flagship youth ensembles) are now prevented – in England - from making the cautious and staged return to activity they were preparing, by the latest guidance published by DCMS.

We are hoping that in Northern Ireland, especially as you are ahead in your management of Covid-19, you will consider this issue before finalising your guidance and agree with us that amateurs and professionals should be treated the same – as they currently are in the Republic of Ireland where group singing/playing has already recommenced.

DCMS gives no justification for this distinction between professional and non-professional, so:

Are we considered to be incapable of assessing and managing risks? 86% of groups are charities, governed by a board of trustees, used to running their organisation and taking care of the well-being of participants. Groups are for everyone, so are likely to include a cross-section of professionals (including doctors!) well able to interpret and act on guidance. Youth and school group managers of course are highly experienced in safeguarding.

Perhaps the sector is thought negligible in its financial impact, but actually it is an essential part of most musicians' living (the sector UK-wide spends £86.4m a year on professionals) and a core part of a venue's sustainability, through regular hires for rehearsals and performances. Spending by the sector also includes music publishers, associated trades (staging, uniforms, marketing, print, photography), hospitality, touring etc..

Why are we asking for this and why is even a small prospect of return to activity urgent and helpful?

Amateurs can be young or old, adults or children, and like everyone have suffered a blow to their mental health during lockdown. The guidance in England is now preventing children from

rejoining their choir, young people from exorcising the pandemic in their band, adults from getting their weekly dose of de-stressing, and lonely grandparents are being held back from their only chance at social connection.

We know of countless cases – even before coronavirus – when participants told us that their choir, their band was a lifesaver, that they couldn't have got through a significant life event, such as a bereavement, for instance, without it, that the group is what keeps them going.

That is urgent. Something to look forward to and plan towards, however socially distanced and perhaps initially musically clumsy, will help.

But it's as urgent for the professionals that we return to being able to engage them as soon as possible as conductors, accompanists, players, soloists. The SEISS finishes in August when their income from the amateur sector will not be restored yet, certainly not if the DCMS guidance is implemented across the nations and continues to forbid activity.

And venues are keen for us to return, at least to rehearsals in the first instance, so they can start building up their income again.

Our audiences, too, around 7.6m of them a year (UK figures), will be keen to see us back – we are their friends, their family, their community, we are the music they first turn to in their neighbourhood.

As a sector, we are utterly committed to the safety of our participants and we believe there is no reason for making separate rules for professionals and amateurs.

The musical activity we represent is part of the fabric of Northern Irish culture and life – and your actions now are crucial to ensuring its survival.

As organisations, our colleagues and I stand ready to offer you and your team insights where helpful, and to support music groups with guidance, templates and help, if you let us move forward in line with the professionals.

We invite you to join a choir or instrumental group as they meet online to hear directly from participants.

Yours faithfully,



Barbara Eifler,
Chief Executive, **Making Music**

FOR SIGNATORIES PLEASE SEE NEXT PAGE



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Debbie Wiseman OBE, composer, conductor, President of Making Music
Stephen McNally, Manager Northern Ireland, Making Music
Paul McKinley, Trustee Northern Ireland, Making Music
Sir Karl Jenkins CBE FRAM, composer
Michael Elliott, Chief Executive, ABRSM
Mark Pemberton, Director, Association of British Orchestras
Sally Groves MBE, Chair, Vaughan Williams Charitable Trust
Susanna Eastburn MBE, Chief Executive, Sound and Music
Leslie East OBE, Chair, Association of British Choral Directors
Sir Andrew Parmley, Chief Executive, Royal College of Organists
Chris Shurety MBE, Director, Contemporary Music for All
Katharine Hogg, President, International Association of Music Libraries (UK and Ireland)
James Murphy, Chief Executive, Royal Philharmonic Society
Robin Simpson, Chief Executive, Voluntary Arts
Steven Roberts, Chair of Trustees, British and International Federation of Festivals
Hugh Morris, Director, Royal School of Church Music
Ben Parry, Artistic Director, National Youth Choirs of Great Britain
Fiona Goh, Director, British Arts Festivals Association (BAFA)
Paul McManus, Chief Executive, Music Industries Association
Nicholas Riddle, CEO, Edition Peters Group
Neil Chippington, Chair, Choir Schools' Association
Atholl Swainston-Harrison, Chief Executive, International Artists Managers Association
Tim Bennett-Hart, Director of Academic, RSL Awards, International Awarding Organisation
Mary-Alice Stack, Chief Executive, Creative United
Hester Cockcroft, Chief Executive, Awards for Young Musicians
Manvinder Rattan, CEO, Sing for Pleasure
Åsa Malmsten, Director, Sound Sense
Fiona Pendreigh, Chair, Music Education Council
Heidi Pegler, Chair, Association of Teachers of Singing
Anna Pensaert, Vice President, IAML
Margaret Oliver, Chair of Trustees: British Kodály Academy
Michael Ashcroft, Chairman of the Trustees, The Community and Youth Music Library
Peter Linnitt, Librarian, Royal College of Music
Naveen Arles, Director, MD Brunch