

2020 saw our first ever online council sessions – we held six meetings, including nation specific ones for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In total 85 people attended.

The meetings are for members only, and look at ‘the bigger picture’: the direction you want your association to be taking, in terms of service provision, or lobbying, or on more specific issues.

Feedback on the website

Our main focus for 2020 was to consult with members about our website. In 2021 we will be starting a project to redevelop our website and launch a new site in 2022. These council meetings were the first stage in consulting members about this project. We wanted to find out:

- what you use the site for
- what works well
- what could be improved
- what could be added.

The below is summary of the most common points made across all meetings. As ever, it was hugely useful to talk to members and hear their thoughts, which have proved a useful launch pad for the project. The next stage of website consultation will be a survey to the wider membership.

What you use the site for

The overwhelming answer here was the resource area of the site.

- The resources most often mentioned were the practical ones to help keep up to date, run your group and save the committee time. such as: GDPR, contracts, charity governance, policies, PRS, copyright and templates.
- Most people said they normally came to the resource section via a link in an email we have sent them, or because they had a specific problem or question that they needed answering.
- There were also lots of comments from people that their usage/visits have increased significantly since COVID.

Some groups used the site mostly or exclusively for insurance (renewing, accessing documents etc)

Other groups used their dashboard area for updating contacts and other group’s details.

Another common comment was that groups do not know the full extent of what is available on the site or make use of the resources, and the site in general, as much as they would like.

What works well

Again, the overwhelming response here related to the resource section and the quality of the content available.

Other comments included that things worked well once you know what to look for/how they worked.

What could be improved

Search facility: this was the biggest theme in this section. A common opinion was that it was not always quick and easy to find what you were looking for. More specific comments on this theme included:

- General site search results throw up lots of unrelated results and often multiple search terms had to be used to try and find the relevant content.
- The resources search is showing up too many/too broad results – or no results for a specific search term/question.
- People were not sure which section of the site to look in for something.
- There needs to be better differentiation and clearer signposting about what the different areas are, and who the content is for.
- Very few people knew it is possible to bookmark and save your favourite resource pages.

The next biggest talking point was design of the site. There were a range of comments, the most common including that it:

- looks a bit old fashioned
- is large/with too many images
- too much white space and scrolling to find key content.

Other comments were:

- The content is sometimes too long and overwhelming. Would be better in bitesize pieces and presented differently.
- Not much content for group members/individuals (as opposed to committee members) – which makes it hard to encourage groups members to engage with the site.
- Not easy to share content with others in group.

What could be added

There weren't too many ideas of completely new things to be added, as the focus was mostly on improving things already there, but some common ideas did emerge:

- Live chat
- Additional user access levels to just access resources
- Member directory/a way of contacting or sharing content with other members

Lobbying and advocacy

The second part of the sessions – as is usually the case - focussed on our lobbying and advocacy work, consulting attendees on priorities and challenges. This year, the two main topics were Adult Music Learning and Social Prescribing.

Making Music's advocacy falls into two main categories:

- Trying to influence policy and/or the environment that leisure-time music groups operate in; this could be reactive (e.g. Covid regulations felt to be unhelpful or unclear to music groups) or proactive (e.g. trying to find better solutions for music libraries in future).
 - o This kind of activity might include 'behind the scenes' discussions or public-facing campaigns, or inviting members to get involved by contacting their elected representatives
- Celebrating leisure-time music activity and raising its profile by telling its 'good news' story.
 - o This kind of activity might include contributing to, commissioning or sharing relevant research on the impact and value of leisure-time music activity; it also includes our new Awards which highlight excellent commissions and projects initiated by members; as well as supporting Make Music Day UK with its unique brand and ability to bring all kinds of musical activity to the foreground and connect it nationally and globally on 21 June each year

Adult Music Learning Manifesto

We created this after many years' frustration that whenever the music education sector got together, despite protestations that adults were included, it always spoke almost exclusively about under-18s. This is understandable because there have been many challenges relating to music education – in or out of school – for under-18s in recent years.

However, there are four times as many adults in the UK as under-18s and all of them could be – if they're not already – enjoying many benefits, for themselves and for their communities, if they were able and encouraged to take up active participation in music.

Following a consultation period and focus groups within the music industry and with adult music learners, Making Music created the Adult Music Learning Manifesto. The manifesto makes it clear that adult music learners are not all of one kind; they have different barriers and challenges to participation from those faced by young people, and that there are practical steps that can be undertaken to widen access to music participation for adults.

This session was an opportunity to go through the manifesto in detail and as a result some changes have been made.

You can read the manifesto [here](#) and you are welcome to contact us if you would like to comment or make suggestions for taking its aims forward.

Social prescribing

Social prescribing gives NHS medical staff the ability to refer individuals, where deemed appropriate, to link workers. These link workers would, after careful consideration of a patient, refer them to arts or sports or other community-based activity to support their health, rather than giving out pharmaceuticals or supporting them within the health care system in some other way.

Making Music have been following the development of this activity from some distance. To get involved more seriously in exploring whether and how leisure-time music groups could be linked up to the link workers and social prescribing activity would require quite a lot of time and (person) resource, and in this session we were seeking members' views about whether they thought such time would be well spent – compared to spending it on other issues facing groups.

There was a lot of interest in the concept, but also much hesitation about getting involved with something like this – a huge machine like the NHS is bound to require time input from groups to get to grips with systems, and groups are already time-poor in terms of the volunteers running them. There was also some scepticism about the benefits to groups such referrals might bring. Overall, attendees endorsed Making Music's action in keeping abreast of developments in this area, but to use its staff capacity on issues closer to their hearts and immediate operations.

Other issues

These other issues which were briefly mentioned and in some meetings discussed include:

- Covid-19 (councils met in the middle of the #BringBackMyBand #BringBackMyChoir campaign); groups were anxious about being allowed to meet again and felt they needed help interpreting government guidelines and with resources to support their ongoing activity and recovery
- Venues: both for rehearsals and performances; size, accessibility, price, availability, prestige; post-Covid this issue has been exacerbated by the need to find larger and Covid-secure venues whilst many spaces are yet not willing or able to take leisure-time groups back
- Music libraries: ongoing as more and more councils struggle with finances and these services are affected
- PRS: the consultation launched last year has been reported on, but due to Covid-19 PRS for Music have not pursued any further steps

Once again, it was really useful for staff and Board to have these discussions in small groups with members, to get valuable feedback on Making Music's activities and have some in-depth conversations on specific topics.

We will be looking at the format of these meetings again, to enable and encourage more members to attend in future, but they are most likely set to remain online, removing one barrier to engagement.