

Question (for House of Commons):

‘To ask the Secretary of State further to his answer to Jo Stevens on why amateur singers in choirs are being unfairly targeted for further restrictions, despite the relaxation of rules for other indoor amateur activities, what the latest public health guidance that he refers to is and why it takes no account of the PHE research last summer that showed that singing was no more dangerous than shouting or exercising in an enclosed space. Why does he believe that these organisations, many of which are charities and answerable for effective management to the Charity Commission are less able than informal clubs to ensure the safety and well-being of their members.’

Question adapted for use in the House of Lords:

‘To ask Her Majesty's Government why amateur singers in choirs are being unfairly targeted for further restrictions, despite the relaxation of rules for other indoor amateur activities; what is the latest public health guidance that this decision is based on and why it takes no account of the PHE research last summer that showed that singing was no more dangerous than shouting or exercising in an enclosed space? Why does the Government believe that these organisations, many of which are charities and answerable for effective management to the Charity Commission, are less able than informal sports clubs to ensure the safety and well-being of their members?’

Further information:

- There are 2.2m singers and 40,000 choirs in the UK
- Current guidance says non-professional music activity can take place indoors and outdoors in numbers above the social gathering limits, as it is organised activity EXCEPT for singing which is restricted to 6 people only indoors
- The nearest comparator is indoor sports which is permitted to take place in any numbers, provided it is organised by a recognised body in a Covid-secure manner
- Choirs are either run by an organisation (e.g. National Youth Choirs of Great Britain, schools, Music Education Hubs) or self-organised as small charities or unincorporated associations (approx. 13,000 adult amateur choirs) or run by professional SMEs, mostly one person businesses
- All choirs have support through relevant professional networks (e.g. Making Music, Association of British Choral Directors, Natural Voice Network, Royal Schools of Church Music etc.) with access to appropriate insurance, relevant Covid guidance and protocol templates, risk assessment guidance etc.
- Almost all choirs are led by music professionals who, thus prohibited from activity, remain reliant on the government's Self Employed Income Support Scheme

- Choirs can be youth choirs, church choirs, school choirs, choral societies, community choirs, gospel choirs, glee clubs, singing for health groups for various conditions (e.g. Parkinson's, Dementia, Lung Health, Mental Health etc.), and many more

The problem:

The updated guidance allows only 6 people to sing together indoors.

The suggested solution:

That indoor singing activity be brought in line with the guidance from 17 May for [other non-professional music activity](#) indoors and [indoor organised sports activity](#).

- [PHE sponsored research](#) showed last year that ***singing is no more dangerous in terms of transmission than shouting or speaking loudly or physical exercise***
- There is a ***misunderstanding about choirs being seen as social activity, when in fact their nearest comparator is indoor sports – choirs are an organised activity***, by a recognised body, usually a charity or business, which is able to put Covid-19 secure protocols in place. They are supported in this by Making Music and other networks and representative bodies.
- Choirs demonstrated last autumn when meeting was permitted that they were able to put protocols in place and operate in a safe manner, without any infections being reported as a result
- Singing together in a group has enormous benefits for participants' mental and physical well-being, as is now well-proven by an extensive [body of research](#). Some of those benefits are derived from the fact that this is a group activity and a potent remedy for loneliness and isolation, one of the determining factors in people's mental and indeed physical health outcomes. But ***whilst singing in a choir has social benefits, it is organised activity structured and led by professionals which centres on the rehearsing and performing of vocal music***; the social outcomes are, so to speak, a beneficial side effect, an ancillary to the activity, as they are for amateur and grassroots sports.

Impact of the current guidance:

- Significant negative impact on the well-being of over 2 million participants in singing groups
- There is a public embarrassment looming, as professional orchestras, which all use amateur choruses, have sold tickets to concerts for which they will now have to change repertoire, reimburse ticket holders and explain the change from the advertised programme
- The UK's 40,000 choirs are led by professionals who remain dependent on the Self Employed Income Support Scheme because they are unable to restart this part of their professional life

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