

# RAISING YOUR VOICE

TOWARDS A POLICY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF CHORAL MUSIC IN IRELAND

BASED ON A REPORT BY FERGUS SHEIL

OCTOBER 2008





## PREFACE

Choral singing is a fundamental and life-affirming artform, marrying the unique ability of the human voice to connect, transcending language, genre and style, with the strength and potential of focussed and responsive communal musicmaking.

The choral sector occupies a unique position in the Irish musical landscape. Its reach is extraordinarily broad, encompassing a wide spectrum of artistic activity from amateur to professional, contemporary to traditional, individuals to large ensembles operating on local and national levels. Its active participants number in the region of 10,000 and it is estimated that choral music touches on the lives of millions of people in Ireland. Amongst these are many dedicated and committed individuals who facilitate choral music making throughout the country, frequently working in a voluntary capacity.

*Partnership for the Arts* has provided a timely opportunity and context within which to reassess the Arts Council's relationship with choral music and this report was commissioned as a first step. The report offers a comprehensive overview of the sector and its needs. It highlights the potential for joined-up thinking, particularly in its advocacy of new modes of interaction between amateur and professional activity.

This report also marks the beginning of what we hope will be an ongoing and developing dialogue with those involved in this vibrant area of the arts.

The Arts Council acknowledges the work of the consultant Fergus Shiel and the widespread and enthusiastic participation of the choral community in its preparation. It also acknowledges the resultant level of expectation within the choral community.

The commissioning of this report has already opened a door between the practitioners of choral music and the Arts Council. In adopting this report in principle and voicing an initial response to it, the Arts Council looks forward to an ongoing and fruitful partnership with the sector.

**Mary Cloake**

*Director*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

This report presents an overview of current choral music practice and performance in Ireland, together with proposals for its future strategic development. An initial Arts Council response to the report is also included. The report followed from a request by the Arts Council for proposals for the development of Choral Music in Ireland; Music Specialist, Fergus Sheil prepared the report. Extensive and phased consultation with the sector was integral to the development of the policy proposals.

### Choral music sector

The choral music sector in Ireland comprises a wide range of choirs (both amateur and professional), other practitioners, resource and support organisations, festivals and venues. As is the case internationally, the choral sector in Ireland is primarily amateur; Ireland has only one state-funded professional choir – the National Chamber Choir. The sector commands a strong level of participation from a wide range of practitioners, including school, youth, church and cathedral choirs, choral societies and institution-based choirs. The current public policy support infrastructure for the sector indirectly encompasses six Government Departments. Key public agencies supporting the sector include the Arts Council, RTÉ, Culture Ireland and Local Authorities. The Arts Council's current supports for choral music are principally through core funding of the National Chamber Choir and the Association of Irish Choirs, support of non-competitive events in choral festivals, and two youth choral initiatives. Practitioners perceive that current public policy does not sufficiently support the choral sector in a strategic and nurturing way and that the sector would benefit significantly from more integrated support from a range of public agencies.

### Choral singing – development needs

To ensure the future strategic development of the choral sector in Ireland a wide range of needs must be addressed. Specific policies and supports are required at pre-school level; both within and outside the formal education system; and for the on-going training and development of choral singers. These include: support for formal training in singing and music for pre-school teachers; increased prioritisation of choral activity within the formal education system and curricula, and a higher profile for choral singing in both primary and second level teacher training. A need for choral specialists to support the development of in-school choral activity is highlighted. Support for the development of youth-based choirs outside the formal education system is required, including continued Arts Council strategic support of the National Youth Choir.

Lack of formal training (particularly in ensemble and sight-singing), and a lack of support for on-going development in choral singing is a barrier to the development of standards in the choral sector. The profile of, and participation in choral music and singing in Ireland, is low by international standards. Increased promotion and advocacy is needed to address this. A need to develop a closer and mutually-beneficial strategic relationship between the amateur and professional choral sectors is also identified. Strategic development needs of singers and choirs can be met through support for the Association of Irish Choirs and other resource organisations. Additionally there is a need for Arts Council funding, specifically targeted to assist the artistic development of amateur choirs. The professional choral sector also needs further strategic support, particularly the National Chamber Choir, professional cathedral choirs and opera choruses.

### **The choral conductor – development needs**

The role of choral conductor is critical to the success of a choir. Currently there is an absence of initial training and education for choral conducting in Ireland. Choral conducting is not perceived as a priority in teacher training or teacher education courses. Opportunities for ongoing professional development of choral conductors are also limited. Few opportunities exist for full-time employment as a choral conductor. A focus on improving the training and career opportunities of choral conductors is an essential element of strategic policy for development of the choral sector.

### **Programming and performance – resources and support**

A range of additional resources and supports are needed to ensure more effective programming and performance in the choral sector. These include widening the range of choral repertoire, particularly new and innovative repertoire, and increased commissioning to create a broadly-based and sustainable Irish repertoire of choral music. Supports are needed to assist choirs to more effectively engage orchestral accompaniment; and to enable more publication and recording of choral music. Other areas of choral performance in need of further support and development are: international choral exchanges, the non-competitive components of choral festivals; increased networking (through both an annual convention and on-line networks). Greater cooperation and integration is also needed between promoters, festivals, and venues (churches, multi-disciplinary venues, and concert halls) to ensure improved scheduling of choral events in the most suitable venues.

### **Choral music policy development**

A strategic approach to supporting the future development of the choral sector is required. The Arts Council should play a lead role, through partnership, advocacy, and strengthening of resource organisations. Recommendations are first made



for policy and actions within existing Arts Council resources; these include the professional development of conductors and singers within choirs, support of quality choral music proposals and proposals for repertoire development, commissioning of new choral music, and support of choral music by venues, festivals and promoters. Recommendations are also made for initiatives that would require new Arts Council resources; these include strategic development of the National Chamber Choir, a funding scheme for development of amateur choirs, and support of Youth Choirs. Ways in which other organizations could play a wider role in developing the sector are proposed; the organizations include Government Departments, State Agencies (e.g. Culture Ireland, RTÉ, National Concert Hall), Local Authorities, and the education sector. A more proactive and strategic approach by the choral sector to planning, partnership, and marketing is also recommended.



## SECTION ONE

**INTRODUCTION****1.1 Introduction**

The background to this policy paper, and the approach used in its development are presented in this section. Key definitions and the structure of the policy paper are also outlined.

**1.2 Background**

The art of singing in a group has been a life-affirming facet of civilisation in almost every culture since the dawn of time. Singing is one of the most natural forms of self-expression encompassing the full range of emotions from joy to sorrow and incorporating many aspects of cultural or social identity including nationalism, political affiliation and religious beliefs. Choral singing is an activity that is within the range of virtually anybody who aspires to it.

Singing is often an integral part of many of life's significant milestones; graduations, weddings and funerals as well as religious and festive occasions. Singing accompanies ceremonial events in countless different cultures. The potent force of communal singing can be witnessed at major sporting events where it is used as a means of enhancing team or tribal affiliations.

Choral singing can have many benefits for those involved. It is a participative endeavour that takes the singers inside some of the great masterpieces of musical composition. It adds significantly to the range of performances available for audiences throughout the country. It is intrinsically a community undertaking, fostering understanding, collaboration and respect. It develops participants musically, cognitively, socially and linguistically. Choral singing is socially inclusive and can be an effective tool for integration. It adds to quality of life and it is seen to have beneficial effects on health and life expectancy.

Throughout the ages, choirs have emerged in many ways. For centuries, religious practice has been a major factor in choral development and even today cathedral and church choirs play a strong role in providing an outlet for singers of many types. Parallel with the development of religious choirs, however, a multiplicity of secular choir types has developed ranging from barbershop quartets to massed choral societies and from local community choirs to accomplished professional ensembles.

In Ireland, choral music is a popular pursuit, indeed it is one of the largest artistic sectors in the country with over 400 choirs and more than 10,000 members performing each year. If one includes church choirs, the number of Irish people who are regularly exposed to choral singing must be measured in millions. Yet by international standards, Ireland is not among the most developed choral centres. Irish religious music infrastructure is not as advanced as other European countries. Choral music has never occupied a central position within the policies of the formal education sector. The Arts Council has not previously prioritised this area for development. Few education opportunities exist for emerging practitioners. On balance, Irish composers have not demonstrated a strong affinity for this area.

Despite the challenges, however, the choral community in Ireland is diverse, encompassing a variety of successful choral initiatives. These depend more on dynamic and committed individuals, however, rather than state policy. Access to high quality choirs tends to be more as an accident of geography rather than as a result of cultural policy.

### 1.3 Policy development - aim and approach

Conscious of the significant potential of Choral Music to engage a wide range of participants, and aware of many of the needs of this sector, The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon requested that its Music Specialist should bring forward proposals for the development of Choral Music in Ireland.

Consultation with the sector was integral to the development of policy proposals. An initial meeting was held with representatives of the choral sector in March 2007. Invitees to this meeting included a cross section of different practitioners in several areas of activity within choral music. The meeting raised many points for discussion and outlined areas of particular need for development. From the meeting a group of three key informants was invited to work with the Arts Council's Music Specialist, Fergus Sheil<sup>1</sup> on developing a policy paper. These were:

- Rosaleen Molloy (Arts Officer, Wexford County Council)
- Bernie Sherlock (Choral Conductor & Lecturer DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama)
- Liz Powell (Choral Conductor, Chair of Association of Irish Choirs)<sup>2</sup>

A subsequent series of focus group meetings was held in May 2007<sup>3</sup>. These four meetings focussed on;

- Choral leadership and artistic policy
- Education and youth

1. Fergus Sheil was consultant Music Specialist to the Arts Council 2004-2007. See Appendix 4 for further details on the author.

2. Liz Powell retired from the board of AOIC during the course of 2007. Later in the year, she was appointed Executive Director of the organisation.

3. See appendix 3 for details.

- Resources and services
- Arts Council Policy

Practitioners and stakeholders with particular expertise in each area were invited to attend these meetings and to contribute to ideas for development. Other informants who did not attend were invited to contribute written submissions<sup>4</sup>.

Research on aspects of choral life in a number of international centres was commissioned. This was undertaken by Catja Gaebel, International Cooperation and Development Manager of Athelas Sinfonietta in Copenhagen, Denmark. Findings from this review are included in Appendix 2 of this report.

A draft policy paper was prepared by Fergus Sheil, and development issues, arising from the consultations and international review, were presented and discussed at meetings in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Sligo and Kilkenny. These meetings were opened to as wide a pool of practitioners as possible and feedback was noted; this informed the subsequent draft of the policy document. The draft document was also discussed in meetings with a range of Arts Council executives in December 2007 and January 2008, prior to it being finalised.

## 1.4 Definitions

### Choral singing

For the purposes of this paper, choral music is understood to mean the performance of notated music by a body of singers. Usually choral music involves more than one singer per part of music, although ensemble singing with one singer per line is also included within the remit of this document. Choral music can be sung in unison or in a number of different parts – typically soprano, alto, tenor and bass – but many further combinations and subdivisions are possible. Choral singing can be unaccompanied (a capella), accompanied by a single instrument or an ensemble of any size.

### Choral practitioner

For the purposes of this paper a choral practitioner is intended to include a singer in a choir, a choral director, or accompanist, a choral composer, a school teacher or principal with responsibilities for school choirs, a member of a board or committee of a choir, a person involved in choral education or those working for the support or development of the choral sector.

4. A list of contributors to the process is provided in Appendix 1.



## 1.5 Report structure

This policy paper reviews the environment for choral music in Ireland and makes proposals for its development in the years ahead. The needs identified, and proposals made, reflect the views of practitioners in the choral sector, based on the consultation process for this paper and the considered opinion of the consultant. The report is structured in seven sections. Section One has outlined the background, aim and approach to the policy paper. The context of choral music in Ireland and its current public support infrastructure is outlined in Section Two. In Section Three aspects of the development needs of the choral singer are outlined; and the needs of choral conductors are addressed in Section Four. Resource and support needs for choral programming and performance are outlined in Section Five. Issues in the strategic development of the choral sector and the specific role of the Arts Council are documented in Section Six. In Section Seven suggestions are made for the strategic role of other organisations in the future development of choral music.

## SECTION TWO

## CONTEXT

## 2.1 Introduction

The context of choral music in Ireland is outlined in this section. An overview of choral singing and the choral sector in Ireland is first presented. The current public support infrastructure is outlined, and stakeholder perspectives on these supports are documented.

## 2.2 Choral singing in Ireland - overview

Like every other country, Ireland's choral community is overwhelmingly amateur in nature and it commands relatively strong levels of participation from a wide spectrum of practitioners. Some amateur choirs perform at a very high level and a wide range of choral repertoire is presented to audiences throughout the country. Unlike the situation with many other amateur arts activities, however, a significant range of choral music is exclusively designed for amateur performance; some areas of the choral repertoire are almost never performed by professional choirs.

For many, engagement with choral music begins in school. Some primary and secondary schools throughout the country have school choirs which range from those designed to sing at school and church events, to more ambitious ensembles that take part in national competitions and other performance platforms. Outside of the formal education sector, a number of youth choirs exist, some that are independently run and others attached to schools of music or other organisations. A number of churches and cathedrals operate children's choirs (boys, girls or mixed) and together with independent children's choirs these organisations make a significant contribution to the development and training of choral singers.

Choral experience at third level education institutions varies greatly. Some universities have a number of different choirs while other institutions have no choral activity at all. Specific training for choral singing, as well as training for choral conducting do not feature strongly (if at all) in most third-level music and education courses. Whereas conducting does appear as part of some undergraduate and post-graduate courses, there are no specific full-time choral conducting courses available in Ireland.

Amateur choirs range from small chamber ensembles to large choral societies and also include church choirs, gospel choirs, ladies choirs, male voice choirs as well as choirs associated with a range of different institutions.

Ireland has only one state-funded professional choir – the National Chamber Choir – which employs seventeen singers on a part-time, year-round basis. Professional singers are also engaged by a small number of cathedral and church choirs. Opera companies also engage free-lance professional singers, but the volume of work available in this sector is low. Professional singers also participate in occasional freelance project-based choral initiatives. The Irish choir Anúna, enjoys a uniquely high profile internationally for its particular blend of ancient Celtic and contemporary Irish music.

Ireland has a number of choral festivals the largest of which is the Cork International Choral Festival. Most choral festivals in Ireland are primarily competitive events but some also include concert performances, workshops, seminars and other events.

Based in Cork the Association of Irish Choirs (AOIC) is an umbrella group for choirs of all types. It operates on a membership basis and has almost 400 subscribers. It runs annual conducting workshops, operates the Irish Youth Choir and provides a range of other supports for members including a music library. In recent years, however, the organisation has undergone a number of personnel changes at board and executive level, and at the time of writing, the organisation is in need of consolidation, rejuvenation and reorientation.

The Contemporary Music Centre (CMC) plays a significant role; it maintains a large library and a database of all types of contemporary composition. CMC has developed a project plan to digitise its library and make it available for online browsing and purchase, and is currently seeking funding to carry this out. CMC also hopes to develop a new role in the support of recording and distribution of Irish compositions.

The Irish Church Music Association, the Royal School of Church Music in Ireland and the Irish Association of Barbershop Singers also provide a range of supports and services within their area of operation.

A relatively unknown aspect of Irish musical life is the contribution or potential contribution of immigrants. Many newer communities in Ireland in recent times have come from eastern European countries that have a rich choral tradition. It is likely that these communities include significant numbers of highly skilled choral practitioners, but the extent of this is currently unknown. In other cases African immigrants have been active in taking part in gospel choirs (both attached to churches and independent).

## 2.3 The choral sector

The choral sector comprises a wide range of choral practitioners and stakeholders. An overview of the sector is provided in Figure 2.1; and aspects of the individual components and constituents of the sector are discussed in the subsequent sections of this policy paper.

**Figure 2.1:**  
*Elements of the choral music sector in Ireland (as featured in this paper)*

| Components                        | Constituents  |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Choirs (amateur and professional) | Cathedral and Church choirs<br>Gospel choirs<br>Ladies choirs<br>Male voice choirs<br>Youth choirs<br>Institution-based choirs<br>National Chamber Choir<br>National Youth Choir<br>RTÉ Philharmonic Choir<br>Opera Choruses<br>Anúna   |
| Practitioners                     | Choir singers<br>Choral director<br>Choral accompanist<br>Voice coach<br>Choral composer<br>Choir boards/committees<br>Choral educationalists   |
| Resource/support organisations    | Association of Irish Choirs (AOIC)<br>Contemporary Music Centre (CMC)<br>Irish Church Music Association<br>Royal School of Church Music in Ireland<br>Irish Association of Barber Shop Singers<br>The Arts Council<br>RTÉ<br>Culture Ireland<br>Local Authorities Arts Offices                      |
| Festivals                         | Cork International Choral Festival<br>Sligo Choral Festival<br>Navan Choral Festival<br>Irish Musical Societies (AIMS) Choral Festival<br>Pipeworks (formerly the Dublin International Organ and Choral Festival)<br>Córfhéile na Scoileanna<br>Co. Wexford Children's Choir Singfest<br>Feis Ceoil |
| Venues                            | Churches<br>Multi-disciplinary arts centres<br>National Concert Hall, Dublin<br>The Helix, Dublin<br>City Hall, Cork<br>University of Limerick Concert Hall   |

## 2.4 Current public support infrastructure for choral music

The public support infrastructure for choral music encompasses the policies and remits of a range of Government Departments and State Agencies, as well as Local Authorities.

### 2.4.1 Government Departments

Choral music currently plays a role albeit indirectly and to varying degrees in the work of a range of Government Departments and/or other agencies:

- The Department of Arts Sport and Tourism funds the Arts Council, Culture Ireland and the National Concert Hall, all of whom have a direct involvement with choral music
- The Department of Education and Science has responsibility for choral music in schools, colleges, and for the training of teachers. In the formal education sector, choral singing can form an important part of the school curriculum at both primary and secondary level. In colleges of education, choral training features in some courses, although often the level of exposure can be low.
- The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government funds the work of Local Authorities who are a key stakeholder;
- The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources funds RTÉ and has a role in overseeing other broadcast organisations;
- The Department of Foreign Affairs has an interest in overseas performances by Irish choirs and in the development of international links;
- The Department of Health and Children has primary responsibility for the pre-school sector, and can also engage with choirs and choral practitioners in the Arts in Health context.

### 2.4.2 State Agencies

State agencies currently with a role in supporting the choral music sector include the Arts Council, RTÉ, and Culture Ireland.

#### The Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon

The Arts Council supports the choral music sector in a number of ways. It provides core funding for the National Chamber Choir (NCC) and for the Association of Irish Choirs (AOIC) – enabling both organisations to undertake a broad range of work.

While the Arts Council does not support competitive events in any artform, it does provide funding to the Cork International Choral Festival, the Sligo Choral Festival and Pipeworks (formerly the Dublin International Organ and Choral Festival) aimed at supporting non-competitive elements of their programmes such as concerts, workshops and seminars.



The Arts Council has also provided direct support for two choral initiatives in the youth sector – the Carlow Young Artists Choir and the Cork Children’s Chorus. Choral applications have been supported through other schemes such as commissions, projects, recordings, travel and training etc, but the profile of choral music within these awards may be considered to be low.

### RTÉ

RTÉ is also a significant supporter of choral music. Within its Performing Groups division, RTÉ maintains two choirs – the RTÉ Philharmonic Choir and the RTÉ Cór na nÓg (youth choir). RTÉ has been a significant co-funder of the National Chamber Choir and plays an important role in the recording and broadcast of choral music on radio.

### Culture Ireland

The recent establishment of Culture Ireland also offers the potential for avenues of support for choirs wishing to promote their work overseas. Culture Ireland has already supported the work of a number of choirs who have performed abroad. This support is crucial for the international exposure of Irish artists and Irish choral repertoire. In addition, Culture Ireland also has the capacity to develop international links and to raise the profile of the Irish choral sector through networking events, showcases, residencies, exchanges, and collaborations.

### 2.4.3 Local Authorities

Over the past twenty years, each of the thirty-four local authority areas in Ireland has established arts offices as a core part of its programmes of work. Under the 2003 Arts Act, each local authority is mandated to prepare and operate an arts plan for the development of the arts within its area. The range of work undertaken by arts offices within the area of music varies considerably. Activities include revenue funding organisations, offering bursary-type funding to individuals, professional development and networking programmes, hosting concerts, series and festivals, provision of music education services, incubation of emerging music organisations, facilitating arts in schools and community contexts, operating capital schemes, provision of facilities, equipment, space and expertise, and a range of other activities. Many local authorities operate significant Percent for Art public art commissioning schemes that are increasingly accessed by musicians.

Increasingly choral music is becoming an important feature of the work of a number of local authority arts offices. This work includes funding choral events, supporting choral music education initiatives, providing grants for choirs, offering

bursaries open to choral directors, helping with information, networking and practical supports, commissioning major choral works or using choral practice as a tool for social integration. One local authority (Wexford County Council) has embarked on a highly innovative publishing arrangement with a major UK publisher leading to the publication of an anthology of Irish language songs for primary schools, *D'Aon Ghuth* by Sue Furlong. Wexford County Council has also supported the ongoing work of the County Wexford Children's Choir which provides an interesting example of how a youth choral initiative can have a big influence on wider music development.

## 2.5 Stakeholder perspectives on current public support infrastructure

Arising from the series of focus group meetings and written submissions associated with this report, stakeholder perspectives on the current range of public supports for choral music can be summarised as follows:

- The majority of choral practitioners who contributed to this process maintain that current public policy does not adequately support the sector in a strategic and nurturing fashion.
- Choral music within the formal education system is seen as having been marginalised. There are insufficient opportunities for the professional development and training of teachers and choral activity in schools is largely extra-curricular.
- The Arts Council has never previously prioritised this area for development, and choral music is seen as lagging behind other music genres and other artforms in terms of funding.
- The Association of Irish Choirs is not currently resourced or structured to make the type of effect on the choral world that is expected of a dynamic and visionary resource organisation.
- New initiatives are needed to encourage Irish composers to write choral music that is accessible to the majority of choirs.
- Choral music would benefit from a greater profile on RTÉ radio and television stations. Other media organisations (including newspapers) are seen to do little to enhance the standing of choral music.

- Despite some successful examples, many other local authorities have little or no interaction with choirs and choral practitioners.
- Most commentators would like to see a closer integration of choral music within the policies of the Arts Council and other state organisations.
- In the area of choral music (similar to traditional music) practitioners call upon the Arts Council to change its mindset in relation to the division between “professional” and “amateur” status with regard to the allocation of funding. In choral music “amateur” does not necessarily imply less than “professional”. The perceived disregarding of amateur choirs is unhelpful to the comprehensive growth and development of the sector.
- Practitioners from within the choral world welcomed the development of this policy document on behalf of the Arts Council. This process is seen as an important first step. It will need to be followed up by continued dialogue between the Arts Council and the choral sector over the years ahead.

## 2.6 Summary

The choral sector in Ireland comprises a wide range of choirs (both amateur and professional), other practitioners, resource and support organisations, festivals and venues. As is the case internationally, the choral sector in Ireland is primarily amateur in nature; Ireland has only one state-funded professional choir – the National Chamber Choir. The sector commands a strong level of participation from a wide range of practitioners, including school, youth, church and cathedral choirs, choral societies and institution-based choirs. The current public policy support infrastructure for the sector encompasses six Government Departments. Key public agencies supporting the sector include the Arts Council, RTÉ, Culture Ireland and Local Authorities. The Arts Councils’ current supports for choral music are principally through core funding of the National Chamber Choir and the Association of Irish Choirs, support of non-competitive events in choral festivals, and two youth choral initiatives. Practitioners perceive that current public policy does not sufficiently support the choral sector in a strategic and nurturing way and that the sector would benefit significantly from more integrated support from a range of public agencies.

## SECTION THREE

# THE CHORAL SINGER AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

### 3.1 Introduction

This section is focused on the backbone of choral life – the choral singer. The path of the singer through all stages of development is traced. Development needs in training for choral singers are identified, within and outside the formal education sector; together with needs in respect of amateur and professional practice.

### 3.2 Pre-school level

In today's society with increased affluence, longer working hours, more two-parent working families and substantially longer commuting times for many people, there is an increased reliance on professional childcare for pre-school children. Attendance at pre-schools and crèches is now the norm in a way that would have been an exception a generation ago. With so many young children spending significant amounts of time in crèches and pre-schools, an ideal opportunity has developed for early intervention in musical development. Children below school-going age are remarkably open to learning, and many can attain significant musical skills even as young as one or two years old. It is not uncommon for children to be able to sing before they can talk. For some pre-school children, singing is a hugely important method of self-expression.

Crèches and pre-schools, however, do not have a curriculum or a system of training for teachers that is overseen by the Department of Education and Science in the same way as primary and post-primary schools. While many such organisations include singing as part of a daily routine, not all have access to the resources necessary to challenge, develop and nurture young voices at an early stage of development. Many pre-school teachers may not have received any training in music or singing. An initiative could be developed involving the AOIC and the Arts Council working in collaboration with the Health Services Executive and Childcare Networks to put in place both training in music and singing for pre-school teachers and access to age-appropriate resources.

### 3.3 Choral singing within the formal education sector

#### 3.3.1 *Advocacy & profile*

Throughout many countries worldwide, the seeds of a vibrant choral sector are sown in schools, where choral singing occupies an important part of the core curriculum. In Ireland, however, the position of choral singing is far from central. Despite a broad welcome for the new primary music curriculum, choral singing is essentially an optional part of the school programme. At second level, music is an optional subject, and within the music curriculum choral performance is an optional element. It is therefore not uncommon for some schools to have no choirs whatsoever and for students to go through their entire school life with no exposure to choral singing.

In Ireland, pockets of excellence exist in school choral activity, but this work is frequently undertaken outside of school hours, during lunch breaks and after school, and its success is dependent on the skills and determination of individual teachers and school principals rather than on official public policy. The progressive marginalisation of choral singing out of formal timetabled classes and into break or free time diminishes the profile of choirs among school students.

Although the primary responsibility for school policies rests with the Department of Education and Science, the Arts Council has the potential to play a significant role in this area as an advocate for more choral singing in the formal education sector. This advocacy role can be exercised in a number of ways – in direct discussion with government departments including the Department of Education and Science, in partnerships with universities, conservatories, colleges of education and other third level education providers, and in discussions with a range of other bodies.

A co-ordinated approach could be developed between the Arts Council and organisations and state agencies in the education sector including the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Primary Curriculum Support Programme, Second Level Support Service, Irish Primary Principals Network, the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, the Post-Primary Music Teachers Association, teachers' unions and the National Parents Council. A programme of discussion, interaction and partnership between the Arts Council and these



organisations would require dedicated resources and time but would prove a valuable investment if the profile of choral music were to be raised in primary and post-primary schools.

### *3.3.2 Teachers' skills*

The skills base of classroom teachers can be a primary barrier to effective development of choral singing in schools. A considerable number of primary teachers will have completed their training with little or no involvement with music. Those who do elect to study music may not receive training in choral conducting and vocal technique. For secondary level teaching, while some training courses involve tuition in choral direction and vocal production, many others do not.

Not all teachers at primary or secondary level will have the same aptitude for choral work. In primary schools, no formal avenues exist for teachers who have choral skills to swap work during class time with less experienced colleagues. This is seen by many as an unnecessary barrier. Discussions between the Arts Council and colleges of education and institutions training post-primary teachers could focus on ways in which the choral skills of all teachers could be developed both as part of their formal training, and by establishing links with the broader choral sector during the training of teachers and throughout their teaching careers.

The Arts Council could also discuss ways of enhancing in-service training for teachers in conjunction with Education Centres and other agencies. The establishment of music teacher professional networks in association with Education Centres could be considered. At primary level, discussions with the Primary Curriculum Support Service could examine the feasibility of maintaining and extending the 'cuiditheoir' system (a scheme through which primary teachers received training and support in the introduction of the new primary curriculum). This is seen by many as an effective way of continually developing the skills base among primary teachers. The provision of a range of conductor training opportunities (discussed in Section 4 of this report) would also include provision for dedicated opportunities for teachers to increase their skills.

### *3.3.3 Choral specialists in schools*

Despite a perceived de-prioritisation of choral activity in the formal education curriculum, many schools have sought to find ways of inviting choral specialists in to schools to train choirs and to work with teachers. The majority of schools, however, do not have access to specialists. The effect of a choral specialist visiting a school can be profound. A significant number of teachers who contributed to this report highlighted this issue as one of particular importance.

This is an area where both the Arts Council and the Department of Education and Science can have a direct effect. The full implementation of Music Networks 2003 Feasibility study *A National System of Local Music Education Services* (which is a stated priority of the Arts Council) would provide supports for the development of in-school choral activity. The Arts Council can also make direct interventions through supporting choral residencies (whereby choral specialists could be subsidised to spend time in schools), arts-in-schools projects and schools performance platforms. The availability of regionally based retained choral experts (discussed in section 4.5 of this report) would also have a profound effect in this regard.

### 3.3.4 Performance opportunities

Whereas many school choirs prepare music for school concerts or end of year events, the availability of high profile performance opportunities outside of the school can also be a powerful motivational tool and a driver for excellence. For many years, as well as choral competitions, school choirs have participated in non-competitive events such as the Cór Fhéile and the National Children's Choir. The annual Co Wexford Singfest is a more recently developed model which could be emulated elsewhere. The Arts Council could have a role in seeking to develop these or other platforms, which can be a vital aspect of school choral singing.

### 3.3.5 Resources

There are many resources that could enhance the quality of choral singing in schools. The work of primary teachers covers a range of subject areas, and although all teachers are trained to implement the entire curriculum, most receive minimal training in music. They will need continuing support in the development of repertoire and techniques. Second level music teachers generally have a greater degree of specific music training, but will still need supports in key ways. Specialist music agencies can offer targeted supports to both primary and secondary teachers including information, guidance, fact sheets, training opportunities, sheet music publications, and recordings<sup>5</sup>.

## 3.4 Youth choirs outside formal education sector

With uneven provision of choral experiences within the formal education sector, many non school-based youth choirs have emerged in centres throughout Ireland. In some cases these youth choirs are attached to independent schools of music or churches while others are supported by local authorities and other institutions. In some cases the choirs are completely independent and have come into existence because of the vision of a key individual or a dedicated group of people.

5. See also Section 5 of this document for further discussion of repertoire and publishing.

Currently there are no structures to support and develop existing choirs or to create new choirs in areas that are not currently served. Key individuals involved in youth choirs have amassed significant expertise, but there is no channel for this experience to be disseminated more widely. No partnership forums or networks exist. Routes for financial support for existing choirs are unclear. By comparison youth orchestras are more strategically supported through the work of the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras and the National Youth Orchestra. Youth drama is served by the National Association of Youth Drama. The Association of Irish Choirs, in conjunction with the Arts Council has initiated research into the feasibility of establishing a network of professionally led, county-based youth choirs of high artistic standing. Support of the proposals arising out of this research will be crucial. In developing a new network of county-based youth choirs, it will be important to map existing provision, capture existing practice and expertise and ensure consistent artistic standards countrywide. Youth choirs must involve best-practice governance models with exacting standards of child protection and a child/youth orientated ethos.

#### Irish Youth Choir

Founded in 1982 the Irish Youth Choir (IYC) seeks to offer unique performance opportunities to young singers between the age of 17 and 29. While the choir has a distinguished history of high quality performances, it has not managed to sustain a high national profile. The Irish Youth Choir is governed and administrated by the Association of Irish Choirs (AOIC), supported by the Arts Council. In 2007 the AOIC commissioned an evaluation study of the Irish Youth Choir with a view to the formulation of a new 5-year strategic plan. It is expected that this work will lead to a sustainable framework for maximising the status and the reach of the choir's work in the period ahead.

Despite many years of successes, it is clear that if additional resources were available there would be considerable scope for the development of this organisation into a national institution of central importance. Currently the IYC enjoys a considerably lower profile than the National Youth Orchestra, or similar national youth choirs in other countries. The feeder routes into the choir are not systematic. The choir does not have a junior or preparatory organisation to prepare emerging singers for participation. It does not currently have any links with the National Chamber Choir. The choir has a low profile in performance outside of its home base in Cork. Orchestral accompanied repertoire is favoured, yet the choir does not have easy access to an orchestra. Membership of the choir does not represent the full geographic spread of the country. Through funding the strategic plan, and in association with the AOIC, the Arts Council seeks to support the development of the choir over the years ahead.

### 3.5 Training for choral singers

For a great number of choral singers, the most significant area of training is participation in choirs. In many ways there is no substitute for on-the-job training in effective choral singing. Yet, of course, not every skill can be developed by singing in an ensemble; vocal production and musicianship are examples of this. A small number of youth choirs attached to cathedrals and schools of music, as well as a number of independent youth choirs endeavour to train young singers, offering musicianship and sight-singing classes alongside regular choral rehearsals. While the work of these organisations is significant, they are exceptional. Some amateur choirs also offer courses in sight-singing, but again these are comparatively rare.

In Ireland, a range of institutions and individuals offer singing lessons. The majority of individual vocal lessons at third-level institutions and other schools of music, however, focus on producing a voice more suited to solo performance than choral singing. Even in the training of professional singers in Ireland, there is almost no attention given to ensemble singing. The development of an entire range of skills and experiences are therefore largely bypassed. Such is the focus on solo performance in the training of singers in Ireland, that scant attention is often given to the development of musicianship – particularly sight-singing. It is not uncommon for singers to gain primary and post-graduate degrees in singing without the ability to sight-sing.

Many choral practitioners contributing to this report have highlighted the lack of training in choral singing to be a primary barrier to the development of standards. A range of stakeholders have a role in eliminating this barrier. Third-level education providers could provide dedicated courses in ensemble singing; Vocational Education Committees, and other institutions involved in life-long learning could introduce courses in vocal technique and sight-singing; the Arts Council could support independent training courses or modules run by individual choirs aimed at choral singers, as well as training opportunities for choral conductors in developing musicianship skills in their choirs. The AOIC could oversee the implementation of sight-singing training opportunities for choral singers. The choral sector itself should place greater emphasis on the development of musicianship and vocal skills.

### 3.6 Amateur choral practice

The vast majority of choral activity in Ireland, as with every other country, is amateur. Choirs typically develop out of the enthusiasm of a key individual or a

small group of practitioners who see the potential rewards of singing in a larger ensemble. Throughout their lifecycle choirs of all types face a range of challenges and opportunities, many of which are outlined in this section.

#### *3.6.1 Raising the profile of the choral sector*

With the low profile of choral singing in schools, large numbers of people emerge from the formal education sector with no knowledge and little appreciation of choral singing. Participation rates among the general population are considered to be low by international standards and this does not foster a dynamic choral sector. The low profile of choral music in the printed media, radio and television also contributes to the invisibility of the sector in many quarters. Immigrants and new communities within Ireland have not found pathways into the choral sector in significant numbers. A programme of advocacy and promotion is needed to encourage greater participation in choral music at all levels of society. The activities of the choral sector need to be highlighted and choral music needs to build new levels of profile in schools, communities and in the media.

#### *3.6.2 Securing and resourcing a music director, vocal coach and accompanist*

The choral director is typically a central lynchpin of every choir. In many cases the director is also the founder of the choir, but choirs can come together in other ways too. Almost every choir at some point in its lifecycle will find itself searching for a new director and each choir will hope to secure a dynamic, visionary and inspirational figure. For many choirs this can be a daunting task. Once a music director has been sourced, choirs sometimes find it difficult to know the terms upon which the director should be engaged. The need for a vocal coach and accompanist also varies from one choir to another depending on existing levels of skill and the rehearsal technique of the choir's director. Support could be offered for choirs both in terms of knowing how and where to find a music director, as well as financial support to resource the full range of the job.

#### *3.6.3 Interaction of professional and amateur sectors*

As is the international norm, Ireland has a small professional vocal world relative to the large amateur choral sector. In many regards, however, there is relatively little interaction between both sectors and this works to the disadvantage of both. Amateur choirs could benefit from vocal coaching and mentoring by professional singers, while professional artists could gain useful employment from engagement with the amateur sector. On some occasions, amateur choirs may seek to engage professional singers to bolster or "stiffen" key sections of the choir for performances. This is often done in an ad-hoc and last minute way, and if planned more carefully, the professional singers could have a more



meaningful interaction with the choir. In other cases amateur choirs who would welcome “stiffeners” do not know how to engage them. A closer relationship between the amateur and professional sector brought about in a planned and supported way would have far reaching benefits.

#### *3.6.4 Rehearsal venues and equipment*

One of the benefits of choral singing is its portability and versatility. Yet despite this, it is important to find an acoustically suitable and comfortable venue in which to rehearse with adequate lighting and heating. Many choirs rehearse in school buildings, church halls or community centres. One complication is the need for a piano or keyboard with which to rehearse, which reduces the range of available options. Local authorities and publicly supported venues may have access to suitable buildings for rehearsals, while support could also be offered for the purchase of equipment (e.g. pianos, keyboards and platform risers).

#### *3.6.5 Skills development*

In general, choirs consistently seek to improve their skills and typically choral directors will use warm-up sessions and other opportunities in rehearsal to develop vocal and musical techniques. Most choirs, however, would benefit from additional programmes aimed at improving vocal production, increasing sight-singing skills or refining musical responses. In some cases, outside expertise could benefit this process, but choirs must be in a position to find resources to enable the engagement of specialist staff.

#### *3.6.6 Repertoire*

The task of selecting repertoire for choirs typically rests with the choir’s director. Constructing a programme of works that will appeal to audiences and also challenge and stimulate the choir can be a demanding task. Choral directors frequently have a broad knowledge of the repertoire and a hunger for finding new works, but it is always helpful for them to be exposed to new works and to have accessible ways of surveying new scores. Choral directors must be afforded sufficient time and resources to be able to devote attention to this area on an ongoing basis. Repertoire choices can often have financial implications and the cost of hiring or purchasing scores of contemporary works can be significant.<sup>6</sup>

#### *3.6.7 Marketing and PR*

For many amateur choirs, the complexity of planning, rehearsing and mounting concerts is so great that effective marketing and public relations can be overlooked. Audiences are often drawn from the same pool of families, friends and supporters with the result that large sections of the potential concert-going public can frequently be unaware of upcoming concerts.

6. See Section 5.2.2 for further proposals in relation to repertoire development.

A co-ordinated national or regional approach to marketing choral events (through advertising, information listing and web outlets) could serve both the purposes of attracting new audiences, and highlighting the diversity of choral activity within the public consciousness.

#### **3.6.8 Governance of amateur choirs**

Amateur choirs are typically governed by a committee or governing body elected from among the members of the choir. Committee members often bring a range of skills, but in many cases key areas of expertise can be missing. In Ireland, there are few networking opportunities for choir committees through which expertise could be exchanged. The development of such a networking platform would offer significant potential for the transfer of skills and knowledge.

#### **3.6.9 Funding**

Many choirs have demonstrated strong abilities to raise funds through annual subscriptions from members, box office income, local authority support, commercial sponsorship and other ways. Most of the proposals contained within this paper, however, will have financial implications that would go beyond the funding paradigms in which most choirs currently operate.

Many of the proposals outlined in this document can be delivered through the effective development of the Association of Irish Choirs or other resource organisations. In other cases, however, amateur choirs will require direct financial support. A new targeted funding stream explicitly reserved for amateur choirs would open up the possibility of choirs accessing relatively modest levels of support to implement ideas for artistic development that could have a significant impact on their work.

### **3.7 Professional choral practice**

Ireland's professional choral world is relatively underdeveloped. One of the principal organisations in this sector is the National Chamber Choir, a 17-member professional choir with a year-round programme of activity, funded by the Arts Council. Another principal source of choral work in Ireland is the professional choirs of a small number of churches and cathedrals, some with centuries of unbroken tradition who regularly perform to a high standard. A third area is within the chorus of Ireland's opera companies. In addition to these three stands, a number of professional choral projects have been undertaken by some groups from time to time.

The term “professional choral singer” needs clarification in an Irish context. Relatively few professional singers earn all or most of their living from singing. This term also includes singers working part-time or full time in non-singing careers who also sing in return for payment. Pursuing a career as a professional choral singer in Ireland can be a highly unstable and financially unrewarding prospect.

### 3.7.1 *The National Chamber Choir*

Established in 1991, the National Chamber Choir (NCC) is the only Irish choir to engage singers professionally on a year-round basis. It has gained a strong reputation for high quality dynamic performances and for innovative and uncompromising programming. The NCC performs a broad repertoire of works but has a special affinity with contemporary music and has commissioned many composers, both Irish and international. The choir performs regularly in Dublin and Belfast and at venues throughout the country.

The NCC receives its core funding from the Arts Council. It is also funded by RTÉ with whom it has both a service level and a broadcasting relationship. The choir also benefits from residency in Dublin City University and receives annual support from the Department of Education and Science towards its education workshops in secondary schools. In early 2007 the NCC experienced difficulties with the sudden resignation of their Artistic Director and Chief Executive Officer. The organisation stabilised itself throughout the year, put a new CEO in place, and secured a new Artistic Director.

In recent years the NCC has coupled artistic excellence with an ongoing struggle to remain solvent, in an environment where its core funding from RTÉ has reduced significantly over time. The choir's singers are on part-time contracts (19 hours per week) and with 17 members, the ensemble is under-resourced in relation to comparable European professional chamber choirs. Faced with an ongoing perilous financial situation, some aspects of the choir's activities have not developed to the optimum degree and the NCC has to some extent been an under-utilised resource. With additional funding the choir could increase its strength to 24 members allowing for greater flexibility and diversity of programming, increase the contract time of its singers to make a full-time singing career more viable and embark on a range of education, mentoring and outreach work that would have a strong positive impact on the wider choral community.

### 3.7.2 Cathedral and church choirs

A relatively small number of cathedrals and churches in Ireland engage professional choirs. Founded in the fifteenth century, the choir of Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin engages professional adult singers (as well as operating a girls' choir) who sing five services each week. The choir of St Patrick's Cathedral Dublin traces its origins back to the thirteenth century. It engages professional men who sing with the boys' choir, providing music for nine weekly services. The Palestrina Choir in Dublin's Pro-Cathedral also engages a number of male singers who sing with the boys' choir. A small number of churches (including St Teresa's Church, Clarendon St and Milltown Parish Church in Dublin) engage professional chamber choirs on a weekly basis. These choirs offer a repository of considerable skills and expertise that could be brought to bear on the development of the choral sector more widely.

### 3.7.3 Opera choruses

Two Arts Council-funded opera companies – Opera Ireland and the Wexford Festival Opera regularly engage professional choruses for their opera seasons. Opera Ireland currently produces two seasons per year with two productions per season. In the region of ten weeks full time work is provided for up to 30 singers. Since 1995, for the majority of Wexford Festival Opera's three annual productions, the Prague Chamber Choir has formed the core of the opera chorus. A small number of additional freelance artists typically complement this group. This represents a further six weeks full-time work for a similar number of singers. In recent years the Anna Livia Dublin International Opera Festival has also engaged a professional chorus when they have mounted full-scale productions in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. Other opera companies have engaged freelance singers to sing in small or semi-professional opera choruses. Occasionally choruses are required for theatre and dance productions.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the National Chamber Choir formed the core of the Opera Ireland chorus. As the NCC's own programme of events expanded, it moved away from this arrangement and Opera Ireland's chorus consisted entirely of freelance artists. Due to the small pool of available work for professional freelance chorus singers, Opera Ireland has found it difficult to recruit chorus members, and has sought to re-engage the NCC on an ongoing basis.<sup>7</sup> The differing vocal and organisational demands of singing in opera and in concert, however, make it unlikely that a union between Opera Ireland and the National Chamber Choir will be sustainable in the longer term.

7. The NCC did perform for the chorus for Opera Ireland's spring season in 2007

For some years, practitioners in the opera sphere raised the possibility of a retained stand-alone opera chorus being shared by all opera companies. If plans for the expansion of main scale productions in both Opera Ireland and Wexford Festival Opera come to pass, this proposal may become more feasible. Opera Theatre Company and other Arts Council funded opera companies could also engage with a new chorus if it existed. Such a chorus could also take a significant role in an education/outreach context and could provide a valuable tool for the Arts Council in the delivery of many of the aspirations contained in this report.

#### *3.7.4 Project-based professional choirs*

As the freelance professional sector develops, it is likely that there will be growth in the area of stand-alone and once-off projects involving professional choral groups singing repertoire beyond that which is already regularly performed. It will be essential for the Arts Council to respond favourably to ambitious proposals in this regard, as this will provide diversity in the range of choral programmes available to Irish audiences and it will increase options for performance and professional engagements for Irish choral singers, conductors and composers.

#### *3.7.5 Ongoing professional development and training*

Professional singers, like all artists, may from time to time require expertise, resources and time in the development of new skills or in their ongoing professional development. As well as core vocal skills, singers may wish to enhance their work in educational or community contexts, or in their interaction with amateur or school choirs. Singers may need time to research or they may wish to work with Irish or international practitioners who may have new insights to offer them. Singers working in existing or emerging professional choirs or as freelance artists would benefit from having avenues available for support in this regard.

### **3.8 Summary**

A wide range of needs must be addressed to ensure the future strategic development of the choral sector in Ireland. Specific policies and supports are required at pre-school level; both within and outside the formal education system; and for the on-going training and development of choral singers. These include: support for formal training in singing and music for pre-school teachers; increased prioritisation of choral activity within the formal education system and curricula, and a higher profile for choral singing in both primary and second level teacher training. A need for choral specialists to support the development of in-

school choral activity is highlighted. Support for the development of youth-based choirs outside the formal education system is required, including continued Arts Council strategic support of the National Youth Choir.

Lack of formal training (particularly in ensemble and sight-singing), and a lack of support for on-going development in choral singing is a barrier to the development of standards in the choral sector. The profile of, and participation in choral music and singing in Ireland, is low by international standards. Increased promotion and advocacy is needed to address this. A need to develop a closer and mutually-beneficial strategic relationship between the amateur and professional choral sectors is also identified.

Strategic development needs of singers and choirs can be met through support for the Association of Irish Choirs and other resource organisations. Additionally there is a need for Arts Council funding, specifically targeted to assist the artistic development of amateur choirs. The professional choral sector also needs further strategic support, particularly the National Chamber Choir, professional cathedral choirs and opera choruses.

## SECTION FOUR

**THE CHORAL CONDUCTOR – DEVELOPMENT NEEDS****4.1 Introduction**

The situation and development needs of the choral conductor are outlined in this section, in respect of initial training, continued professional development, and employment and career opportunities.

**4.2 Function and roles**

The success of a choir depends largely on its conductor. He or she frequently defines the artistic policies of the choir and is instrumental in fostering skills and musicianship among the members of the choir, leading them through the rehearsal period towards eventual performance. Improving the skill base of choral conductors is the single factor that is likely to have the most impact on the overall quality of choral endeavour in Ireland.

Choral conductors are a diverse group and few if any Irish artists can sustain a career as a full-time choral conductor. Many combine their choral work with teaching positions within second level schools, music schools or third-level institutions. Conductors of amateur choirs are frequently under-resourced in terms of time, professional development supports and financial remuneration.

**4.3 Training**

Unlike many international examples, no third-level university, institution or training college in Ireland offers a full-time specialist course in choral conducting. Whereas post-graduate performances courses are available in conducting, these are not specifically geared to the development of choral specialists. Among the range of third-level music and education courses available at institutions in Ireland, choral conducting frequently represents a minor part of courses currently available. In primary level teacher-training and education colleges the position of training in choral conducting generally reflects the low profile of choral singing on the school curriculum. Section 4.4 following, relates to the short-term training and professional development opportunities and needs of choral conductors. However, without the provision of long-term full-time courses in choral leadership, the skill base of existing and emerging choral conductors will only develop in sporadic ways.

**4.4 Continued professional development**

Artists of all types benefit from continually refining and analysing their own practice and seeking to develop new skills and new techniques. In Ireland some



opportunities currently exist for choral directors to participate in professional development programmes, but these are relatively few and need further development. One of the principal avenues for short-term training in choral conducting is the series of master-classes and workshops run by the Association of Irish Choirs. These opportunities are considered to focus on the early stages of development of choral conductors, and there is a vacuum in the ongoing training of more advanced conductors. Although in the past the National Chamber Choir has had an assistant conductor, this position no longer exists. Such an assistant conductor post, or posts operated in conjunction with cathedral choirs, would provide valuable opportunities for emerging choral directors.

A wider range of opportunities for professional development of choral conductors is needed. Assistant conductor positions, choral residencies, master-classes and workshops should be available for choral directors at different levels of development. Specific events for teachers, church choir directors, advanced practitioners and others should be supported. The AOIC, National Chamber Choir, professional cathedral and church choirs, third level education institutions, choral festivals and others could work together to bring about these opportunities.

#### 4.5 Sustaining a career as a choral conductor

There is no clear career path for choral conductors in Ireland. Many begin conducting through working with groups of colleagues or friends, subsequently perhaps gaining enough experience to be subsequently invited to work with additional choirs. Financial remuneration can be limited, and contracts seldom reflect the range of background work associated with being the music director of a choir. Few if any choral conductors sustain a full-time living from conducting choirs, and therefore take up employment in another sphere; this often negatively effects the time and energy left available to dedicate to choral work.

The majority of paid conductors receive a fee for rehearsing and performing only. In some cases conductors forgo fees in favour of using these resources for other choral expenses. The opportunity to research new choral repertoire, to examine new methods of working with choirs, or to spend time observing the work of other choral directors is rare. Like many artistic professions, conductors tend to gravitate towards major centres of population where more work is available. This has a negative effect on the availability of skilled practitioners in less populated regions.

If Ireland is to develop a range of top quality choral conductors, resources must be found to enable these artists to devote themselves exclusively to their chosen

area. One strategic avenue to accomplish this and to also realise other aims would be the development of regionally-based full-time choral specialist positions potentially in conjunction with local authorities. Regional choral experts would have a role conducting choirs, working as specialists in schools, training teachers, devising projects, providing support and generating enthusiasm and expertise in choral music. The choral sector should be encouraged to respect the wide range of duties involved in being a choral director, and to pay appropriate fees to professional conductors. Where necessary, avenues for financial support for professional fees should be made available.

#### 4.6 Summary

The role of choral conductor is critical to the success of a choir. Currently there is an absence of specialist initial training and education for choral conductors in Ireland. Choral conducting is not perceived as a priority in teacher training or teacher education courses. Opportunities for ongoing professional development of choral conductors are also perceived as limited. Few opportunities exist for full-time employment as a choral conductor. A focus on improving the training and career opportunities of choral conductors is an essential element of strategic policy for development of the choral sector.

## SECTION FIVE

# PROGRAMMING AND PERFORMANCE - RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

## 5.1 Introduction

In this section aspects of choral programming and performance, and resources and support for choral performance are discussed. These include: choral repertoire, orchestral accompaniment; recording and broadcasting, international exchanges; festivals; promoters and venues; networking and partnerships. This Section has been informed by the views of choral sector practitioners and the consultant's considered opinion.

## 5.2 Choral repertoire

Programming a concert can be a challenging task. Conductors generally choose works that play to the strengths of their choir, but at the same time, repertoire choice can often be a way of challenging choirs in new directions. At all times programmers must be mindful of the impact of the programme on the audience. Governing all aspects of programming choices, however, is the conductor's breadth of knowledge of the choral repertoire. While there will always be a core set of works that remain popular, it is essential for the vitality of the choral sector that the range of repertoire performed continues to widen.

### 5.2.1 *Broadening choral programming*

The repertoire of choral works available to choirs is extraordinarily broad. Conductors navigate their way through this wide range of choices by relying on their experience, their access to libraries, by browsing in shops or increasingly through the many online resources at their disposal. The AOIC or other resource organisations can have a key role in helping choral directors encounter new works. Accessing printed scores for new works can be difficult and expensive. Ideas for library sharing among choirs need to be examined and funding for purchase of scores of new repertoire should be considered. In any new funding streams for choral activity, the exploration of new and innovative repertoire should be prioritised.

### 5.2.2 *The Irish choral repertoire*

Although Irish composers have written choral works for generations, Ireland could not be considered to have a comprehensive indigenous repertoire of choral works, certainly not in the way many European countries – particularly the Nordic and Baltic states – have. With few exceptions, Irish choral music is seldom performed internationally and suffers from a low profile at home. Accessibility

and availability of the current Irish choral repertoire is a major issue. Support for publication and recording of Irish choral works has not been prioritised, and resources of printed music are scattered throughout many different locations.

The library of the AOIC is a considerable source in this regard, as is the Contemporary Music Centre which has scores of over five hundred Irish choral compositions. RTÉ too has amassed a sizable choral library over many years. The library of the Cork International Choral Festival is housed in the Cork County Library. Many historic Irish choral works are located in Trinity College Library and the National Library of Ireland (where many of them are not catalogued). Irish choral compositions are also found in significant numbers in the British Library and other overseas institutions.

There is no central reference point for existing Irish choral repertoire, and it is difficult to know what is in existence and where it is. A central reference point and online database would be a valuable resource that would increase the profile of Irish choral music. The publication and recording of music has become cheaper and easier and it would be a relatively simple step to publish graded, sorted and categorised anthologies of Irish choral music including both printed music and recordings. This too, would have a profound effect on raising the visibility of existing works.

### 5.2.3 *Commissioning new works*

The vibrancy of the choral artform in Ireland depends on the constant development of the contemporary repertoire for choirs. Although a handful of Irish composers are seen to write idiomatically for choirs, many choral directors feel that most Irish composers have little interest in or affinity for choral music. All too frequently Irish choral compositions are seen as too technically difficult and unrewarding. The première performance is often also the last outing. Many attribute this perceived incompatibility between composers and choirs to the fact that choral music can have a low or non-existent profile in the development of composers at school or college.

New ideas are needed for commissioning. Interested composers must be encouraged to spend considerable time immersing themselves in the choral world, by studying choral compositions and by experiencing the real-life ongoing

work of choirs. A significantly greater level of commissioning is also called for and amateur choirs must be encouraged to commission more. With the current low levels of choral commissioning, a broadly based and sustainable Irish repertoire is not likely to be created. Local authorities can make a significant contribution through the Per Cent for Art commissioning scheme.

### 5.3 Orchestral accompaniment

Large and medium scale choirs and choral societies frequently perform repertoire that is accompanied by an orchestra. This can range from a small early music or classical ensemble to a full-scale symphony orchestra. Major choral works involving symphonic accompaniment are performed by the RTÉ Philharmonic Choir with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra on a regular basis as part of the orchestra's subscription series at the National Concert Hall. These performances do not typically tour outside of Dublin.

The RTÉ Concert Orchestra periodically collaborates with choirs, but this represents only a small fraction of choral performances with orchestral accompaniment. In most cases, choirs must source and pay for their own orchestras, usually by engaging the services of an orchestral fixer. The costs involved in engaging a professional orchestra are high and in most cases choirs can only afford to pay for one orchestral rehearsal in advance of the concert.

Engaging a full-size orchestra represents a major financial commitment for choirs, and a correspondingly large box-office income is virtually always needed to cover this cost. The cost and the lack of adequate rehearsal time seriously mitigate against the capacity of choirs to investigate less familiar or more complex repertoire. Some choral conductors will find the prospect of conducting a full professional orchestra a daunting proposition and in a hothouse atmosphere of pressurised rehearsal time, adequate space for professional development is absent.

A variety of options could be considered to help develop this area. Choirs could have access to fact sheets including orchestral fixers and how to engage them. Choirs could be offered resources towards the engagement of orchestras – particularly when new or complex repertoire is planned. A more far-reaching solution would be to fund the development of a dedicated retained orchestra that would be available to choirs throughout the country on a subsidised basis and would offer appropriate rehearsal periods and professional development opportunities for choral conductors.

#### 5.4 Recording, broadcasting and publications

Though choral music is frequently encountered in public performance, the range of concerts that practitioners will be able to attend is likely to be limited. Therefore more widespread knowledge and understanding of choral music will come from recordings, broadcasts, publication and from transmission through newer digital electronic media. A variety of measures could underpin this area including support for the publication and recording of choral music, a greater profile for choral music in the broadcast media as well as utilising a host of newer digital avenues for dissemination through webcasting, and podcasting.

#### 5.5 International choral exchanges

International exchanges between choirs are important for many reasons. Through these events choirs have the opportunity of exposing themselves to experiences and practices in other countries. Exchanges can significantly enhance the choir's profile internationally and touring provides welcome opportunities to perform to new audiences. International choirs visiting Ireland can offer significant new dimensions for Irish audiences both in terms of performing practice and repertoire.

Yet exchanges can be hard to set up, and difficult to make financially viable. Transport and accommodation costs can be significant and planning for the availability of a large choir must be undertaken a long time in advance. Both the Arts Council and Culture Ireland have an ongoing role in this area. Culture Ireland supports Irish performers travelling overseas, while The Arts Council has supported the inward touring of choirs. It would be of particular benefit if Arts Council support in this area was reserved for choirs whose work has the potential to add significantly to the range of choral performances available to audiences in Ireland. Local Authorities and Leader organisations may also have a role to play in supporting international exchanges.

#### 5.6 Festivals

Choral festivals in Ireland are predominantly competitive-based events. The principal festival is the Cork International Choral Festival. Other competitive events include the Sligo and Navan Choral festivals and the Association of Irish Musical Societies (AIMS) choral festival in New Ross. Pipeworks (formerly the Dublin International Organ and Choral Festival) does not include choral competitions, but focuses on high-quality performances.



The Arts Council does not support competitive events in any artform. Funding is offered to the Cork and Sligo festivals based on their non-competitive events – concerts, workshops, and seminars. Many in the choral community, however, feel that this non-competitive aspect of festivals is not sufficiently developed, and that there remains a significant opportunity to add value to choral festivals in a range of ways including formal networking opportunities, commissioning and performance of new works, seminars on a range of choral topics, workshops and master-classes and non-competitive performance opportunities.

Opinion within the choral sector about the value of competitions is mixed. Many people maintain that music is not intended to be competitive, and that fixation on winning or losing runs counter to the essence of musical endeavour. Preparing for a competition can result in choirs endlessly fine-tuning a small repertoire rather than spending time developing musically or technically. On the other hand, other choral commentators are strongly committed to the concept of competitions, seeing them as a way of providing a high quality performance opportunity in a major venue, to motivate choirs to reach their maximum potential and to encounter new repertoire. Undoubtedly festivals provide an important platform for interaction and networking and they also serve to foster a sense of community within the choral world. While the Arts Council's policy of targeting support at non-competitive elements of choral festivals is valuable, with additional resources, choral festivals could make an even stronger impact.

## **5.7 Promoters, venues and audiences**

Securing a sympathetic performance venue for choral performances is important from both an artistic and a logistical perspective. Church concerts can offer good acoustic experiences, large audience capacities, adequate parking and in some cases a concert can be promoted through church newsletters. On the negative side, however, churches do not normally offer box office facilities, credit card or internet purchases, bar or refreshment services, comfortable seating or toilets. Backstage areas can be cramped, sometimes to a critical degree.

Over recent years, almost every county in Ireland has developed a multi-disciplinary arts centre, whose operation is often funded by both local authorities and the Arts Council. The vast majority of these centres, however, are acoustically unsuitable for choral performances, as the sound is generally very dry and provides little resonance or warmth. On the other hand, Arts Centres do offer many of the facilities that churches lack. The profile of choral music among multi-disciplinary arts centres is currently very low.

Ireland has few dedicated concert halls. The National Concert Hall (NCH) in Dublin is the only state-funded venue dedicated exclusively to music. Such is the demand on bookings in the NCH and the costs associated with hiring the hall that this venue is out of reach of nearly all choirs. The NCH, however, is one of the few venues in Ireland that is particularly suited to choral singing – particularly large choral and orchestral events. Other venues suitable for large scale choral singing include the Helix in Dublin, the City Hall, Cork and the University of Limerick Concert Hall. In recent years the Arts Council has significantly increased funding to specialist music promoters throughout the country. Not all promoters feature choral concerts among their programmes, as choirs within their areas often have established self-managed performance patterns, and with the exception of the National Chamber Choir, touring of choirs beyond their home base is relatively uncommon.

While many elements of physical infrastructure for music are currently available in Ireland, these are not adequately integrated or coordinated for the choral world. Multi-disciplinary arts centres could schedule choral events in other more suitable premises, such as churches with fine acoustics and music promoters and arts festivals could contribute more strongly to choral development. It is important that the NCH remains within the reach of large choirs for major events and the choral sector itself should seek to interact more with other organisations and agencies.

## 5.8 Networking and partnerships

Many practitioners working in the Irish choral world operate year after year without any significant degree of interaction with their peers. Although the Irish musical world is small and artists are generally familiar with one another's work, the sense of choral community available through direct contact or online could be greatly strengthened. Such is the diversity of choral practice in the country that significant inspiration could be garnered from knowing more about the work of colleagues.

In many countries, annual choral conventions are held with particular focuses on different areas of practice. Such an event in Ireland would be a great addition to musical life. An annual convention could include workshop and training opportunities for conductors, singers and composers, and it would also provide a platform for skills transfer and networking among choral committees. As well as the Arts Council, other agencies could benefit from participating in such a convention: RTÉ, Culture Ireland, Department of Education and Science, Local

Authorities, County Development Boards and Leader organisations. In addition to a major convention such as this, avenues for on-line networks could be greatly strengthened.

## 5.9 Summary

A range of additional resources and supports are needed to ensure more effective programming and performance in the choral sector. These include widening the range of choral repertoire, particularly new and innovative repertoire, and increased commissioning to create a broadly-based and sustainable Irish repertoire of choral music. Supports are needed to assist choirs to more effectively engage orchestral accompaniment; and to enable more publication and recording of choral music. Other areas of choral performance in need of further support and development are: international choral exchanges; the non-competitive components of choral festivals; and increased networking through both an annual convention and on-line networks. Greater cooperation and integration is also needed between promoters, festivals, and venues (churches, multi-disciplinary venues, and concert halls) to ensure improved scheduling of choral events in the most suitable venues.

## SECTION 6

## STRATEGIC ISSUES IN CHORAL MUSIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE ARTS COUNCIL.

### 6.1 Introduction

This policy document is recommended to the Arts Council as an initial step in the development of the choral sector. It should be reviewed after a three-year period and, if necessary, should be modified, added to or replaced.

Strategic issues to be addressed in a support policy for the choral sector in Ireland are first presented in this section; these are based on the key findings and conclusions from this review, as discussed in Sections 2-5. Specific development supports that could be provided by the Arts Council are then presented.

### 6.2 Key strategic development issues

#### 6.2.1 Public sector support infrastructure

The choral sector commands a strong level of participation from a wide range of practitioners, including school, youth, church and cathedral choirs, choral societies and institution-based choirs. The current public policy support infrastructure for the sector encompasses six Government Departments. Key public agencies that have a role in supporting the sector include the Arts Council, RTÉ, Culture Ireland and Local Authorities. The Arts Councils' current supports for choral music are principally provided through core funding of the National Chamber Choir and the Association of Irish Choirs, support of non-competitive events in choral festivals and two youth choral initiatives. Choral practitioners, however, perceive that current public policy does not sufficiently support the sector in a strategic and nurturing way and that the choral sector would benefit significantly from more integrated support from a range of public agencies.

#### 6.2.2 Sector development needs

##### Choral singing

A wide range of needs are identified for the strategic development of choral singing. Specific policies and supports are needed at pre-school level; both within and outside the formal education system; and for the on-going training and development of choral singers. These include: support for formal training in singing and music for pre-school teachers; increased prioritisation of choral activity within the formal education system and curricula, and a higher profile for choral singing in both primary and second level teacher training. Other development needs include: the support of choral specialists in the development of in-school choral activity; and continued support for the development of youth-based choirs outside the formal education system.

Lack of formal training (particularly in ensemble and sight-singing), and a lack of support for on-going development in choral singing is a barrier to the development of standards in the choral sector. The profile of, and participation in choral music and singing in Ireland, is low by international standards. Increased promotion and advocacy is needed to address this. There is a need to develop a closer and mutually-beneficial strategic relationship between the amateur and professional choral sectors. Strategic development of singers and choirs can be assisted through support for the Association of Irish Choirs and other resource organisations. Additionally there is a need for specifically targeted Arts Council funding, to assist the artistic development of amateur choirs. The professional choral sector also needs further strategic support, particularly the National Chamber Choir, professional cathedral choirs and opera choruses.

### Choral conducting

The role of choral conductor is critical to the success of a choir. Currently there is an absence of specialist initial training and education for choral conductors in Ireland. Choral conducting is not perceived as a priority in teacher training or teacher education. Opportunities for ongoing professional development of choral conductors are also perceived as limited. Few opportunities exist for full-time employment as a choral conductor. A focus on improving the training and career opportunities of choral conductors is an essential element of strategic policy for development of the choral sector.

### Programming and performance

A range of additional resources and supports are needed to ensure more effective programming and performance in the choral sector. These include widening the range of choral repertoire, particularly new and innovative repertoire, and increased commissioning to create a broadly-based and sustainable Irish repertoire of choral music. Supports are needed to assist choirs to more effectively engage orchestral accompaniment; and to enable more publication and recording of choral music. Other areas in need of further support and development of choral performance are: international choral exchanges, the non-competitive components of choral festivals; increased networking (through both an annual convention and online networks). Greater cooperation and integration is also needed between promoters, festivals, and venues (churches, multi-disciplinary venues and concert halls) to ensure improved scheduling of choral events in the most suitable venues.

## 6.3 Strategic partnership approach and the role of the Arts Council

### 6.3.1 Partnership

A strategic approach to supporting the future development of the choral sector is required. The Arts Council should play a leading role in the development of the choral sector in the years ahead, in partnership with sectoral resource and support organisations. Additionally the development of the sector should be supported by other public agencies, acting both in partnership with the Arts Council and independently. The potential role of these organisations is outlined in Section 8.

The analysis of choral practice in Ireland has shown that this is a sector uniquely placed to deliver on a whole range of Arts Council objectives as outlined in the council's 2005 policy document – *Partnership for the Arts*. The wide range and diversity of choral practice align it closely with the first and third of the five goals in *Partnership for the Arts*<sup>8</sup>; namely to 'affirm and promote the value of the arts in society'; and 'make it possible for people to extend and enhance their experiences of the arts'. Proposals for future support of the choral sector will also allow for the realisation of the other three goals: 'assist artists in realising their artistic ambition'; 'strengthen arts organisations countrywide so as to secure the basis of a vibrant and stable arts community'; and 'ensure the Arts Council works effectively'.

### 6.3.2 Advocacy

Analysis of Ireland's choral sector suggests that the Arts Council and the choral community know relatively little about each other. Few of the thousands of choral practitioners in Ireland have any awareness of the potential supports that exist. For its part, the Arts Council has not yet fully enabled the choral sector to reach its potential. By working in partnership with a range of other organisations, the Arts Council could have a profound and far-reaching effect. In part this is dependant upon the extent to which the Arts Council operates in a proactive manner. Therefore a key recommendation of this report is the development of an advocacy voice.

It is suggested that this policy document be regarded as a starting point, not a conclusion. It will be essential to continue to monitor the needs of the choral world and respond with additional policies and supports as the sector develops in the years ahead.

8. Partnership for the Arts, Arts Council Goals 2006-2010, The Arts Council, 2005.

The Arts Council's work can influence development in the choral sector in a number of ways. As well as offering financial support to organisations and individuals, the Arts Council has considerable capacity to act as a champion of choral music and to use its voice as an effective advocate for the sector. The programme of advocacy that the Council could pursue lies in the building of relationships with other stakeholders. In order to pursue this body of work, however, the Arts Council will need to build its own capacity as an advocate.

### *6.3.3 Strengthening resource organisations*

The Arts Council delivers on its policy priorities in a number of ways. However, it is suggested that the Arts Council will have the strongest effect on the choral sector if it seeks to support one or more dynamic resource organisations that have strong capacities to develop new programmes, far-reaching visions for the development of choral music, and confidence to deliver change for the sector. The Arts Council and the resource organisation(s) should maintain a close working relationship with regard to the development of initiatives arising from this report and the formulation of future policies. The roles and scope of these organisations must be clearly defined in relation to choral music, and resources committed to them must reflect the nature of the work that is expected of them. Central to the delivery of any new supports will be a campaign of awareness building whereby the gulf in knowledge and understanding between the choral sector and the Arts Council can be effectively bridged.

## **6.4 Priorities for Arts Council Support**

Future Arts Council support for the sector can be prioritised in three areas:

- Policy development and actions within existing resources
- Priorities requiring new resources
- Areas for further research.

### *6.4.1 Policy development and actions within existing Arts Council resources*

Proposals for Arts Council support for development of choral music that can be undertaken within its existing resources are as follows:

It is recommended that the Arts Council takes a proactive developmental approach to choral music. In addition to introducing new developments proposed in this document, it is recommended that high-quality choral applications within existing funding programmes be prioritised for support. A fixed-term of positive discrimination could be considered.



The choral sector is largely amateur in nature. In order to bring about sustained development of the sector the council will need to develop strong links with the amateur sector. This will involve new ways of relating to and interacting with amateur organisations, new ways of providing advice and support as well as a new policy of making targeted financial support available to amateur choirs. The council will need to retain expertise in this area. New communication tools will need to be developed with the sector.

The Arts Council could seek to ensure that all of its funded organisations, particularly venues, festivals and promoters, participate in a strategic and co-ordinated way in the ongoing development of the choral music sector.

The Arts Council should continue to support non-competitive elements of choral festivals, particularly concerts, commissions, workshops, seminars, discussions, and master-classes. Festivals should maximise their impact in these areas. Festivals should also seek to build the profile of Irish composition within their events.

The Projects: New Work and Projects: Once-off schemes should respond positively to ambitious proposals for professional choral projects including those that programme Irish choral repertoire, both new and existing. Projects: Once-Off could be used to support costs associated with the performance of international choirs in Ireland, where the performance quality and choice of repertoire adds significantly to what is currently available to audiences.

Through the Bursary scheme, support is recommended for choral directors embarking on programmes of professional development, mentoring or research. Composers could be supported to spend time in residence with choirs and to conduct research in the choral field.

Professional, amateur, school and church choirs as well as festivals, promoters and venues should be encouraged to commission new works through the commission scheme. Support should be offered to demystify steps involved in commissioning. It would be effective if greater resources were devoted to commissioning, including perhaps the ring-fencing of a dedicated choral commissioning budget for a five-year period.

Continue to offer support for both short term and formal post-graduate training abroad and international mentoring for choral conductors through the Travel and Training award.

The Arts Council is recommended to consider the development of a residency scheme open to schools that would facilitate the engagement of professional choral specialists in schools contexts

#### *6.4.2 Association of Irish Choirs*

Proposals for actions that can be undertaken by the Association of Irish Choirs, with Arts Council support are:

Market available resources and supports to the choral and education sector. Work with schools and amateur choirs to develop their capacity to access residencies, commissions and other schemes.

Seek to secure the accreditation of existing AOIC conducting courses with the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and with the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) so that credits earned by participants could contribute to the eventual awarding of a formal qualification.

Research the feasibility of the development of a co-operative library service with a central “brokering” system. Initiate discussions with The Library Council to discuss the greater profile of choral music in the public library system.

Maintain a database of conductors, vocal coaches, accompanists, mentors, specialist staff, orchestras and orchestra managers for reference by its members. Offer guidance and support to members in this regard.

Update and publish guidelines for choirs in the engagement of a music director including a detailed job description template covering the entire range of duties that a music director should undertake.

Examine ways of making choral risers (including the AOIC’s own risers) more easily available to choirs throughout the country.

Collaborate with the Health Services Executive and other agencies to assess the feasibility of developing a choral training programme for pre-school teachers. Harness existing skills and experience of practitioners within the pre-school music sector.

Support the development of a formal network of choir committees / governing bodies. This network could develop a voluntary set of guidelines for choir committees. It could participate in an annual convention or networking event designed to raise skills among committee members, to share knowledge and to expose committees to best national and international practice.

### 6.4.3 *Priorities requiring new resources*

Proposals for policy development and initiatives that would require new Arts Council resources and funding are as follows.

**(i) Appoint a Choral Development Advisor**

In order to build relationships with the choral sector and to deliver on the proposed programme of advocacy with other stakeholders outlined in Section 8, the Arts Council will need to significantly develop its own capacity. The appointment of a Choral Development Advisor as part of the Music and Opera team is recommended, for a fixed period of three years, during which time the instigation of many of this report's recommendations will be initiated.

**(ii) Support increased training opportunities for choral conductors.**

Work with resource organisations, the National Chamber Choir, professional cathedral and church choirs, festivals, educational institutions and other bodies to ensure the availability of a wide range of professional training opportunities for conductors at all levels of ability and experience including assistant conductor positions, residencies, workshops and master-classes. Specific courses for primary and secondary teachers should also be provided.

**(iii) Develop the National Chamber Choir (NCC)**

The NCC should be resourced to a sufficient degree to allow it to reach its full potential. Facilitate the recruitment of extra singers to bring the choir to 24 members and move towards a full-time contract for the members of the choir. Encourage the NCC to continue its commitment to contemporary repertoire including the development of its remit to work with Irish composers. Enable the NCC to significantly develop its education and outreach work and to have a more in-depth relationship with the amateur/youth/school choral sectors. Enable the participation of the NCC and its conductors in workshops/master-classes for Irish conductors.

**(iv) Introduce a funding scheme for development of amateur choirs.**

Funding for development of amateur choirs should be introduced; via a dedicated scheme administered directly by Arts Council or in conjunction with a resource organisation. The scheme should offer direct financial support to choirs for contribution to costs associated with targeted purposes. Such targeted purposes would include: hiring of skills - conductor, vocal coach, section coaches, guest directors or other

specialist staff; development of skills of singers – either vocal technique or musicianship/sight-singing; meeting costs associated with innovative repertoire expansion, music hire/purchase, extra specialist staff, rehearsal costs and orchestral fees; and touring programmes within Ireland.

**(v) Support Youth Choirs.**

Respond to studies currently underway in association with AOIC examining options for a county-based network of youth choirs and the development of the Irish Youth Choir. Choirs should be professionally led and managed, and should be underpinned by a strong networking and support organisation.

**(vi) Fund engagement of full-time regionally based choral experts.**

Partner with local authorities or other organisations where possible. Experts would conduct amateur, church, youth or school choirs, provide workshops in schools, liaise with teachers, develop skills locally, devise choral projects and raise awareness of choral practice within an area. Time and resources for research and professional development would also be included.

**(vii) Development of Web Resources**

Develop web presence to target two principal areas – PR/profile of choral sector and provision of resources to practitioners. The PR campaign should highlight all upcoming concerts via a new website for choral events, a weekly or monthly email newsletter. Online discussion fora and weekly or monthly information newsletters, podcasts and RSS feeds should be developed to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and information within the sector on an ongoing basis. These resources would be best co-ordinated by both the Association of Irish Choirs and CMC and should build on existing capacities and expertise.

**(viii) Publication and recording of Irish choral music.**

Support for the online or print publication of sheet-music anthologies of choral music, sorted and graded and marketed to relevant choirs. This could include anthologies for school choirs, mixed choirs, female voices, male voices, accompanied and unaccompanied, Irish language, English and other languages. Anthologies should be selected and graded by choral specialists. Support is also needed for both commercial and promotional recordings of choral music – some of which could be linked to the anthologies of sheet-music. All should be available for on-line sales.

With additional resources, the Contemporary Music Centre may consider itself well positioned to deliver on this objective.

**(ix) Other Initiatives**

In conjunction with AOIC, instigate a national promotional campaign designed to highlight the benefits of choral singing at all levels of society. Advocate for higher profile of choral music in the media including printed, broadcast and electronic media.

Support the inauguration of an annual convention for choral practitioners including conductors, composers, choir members, committees and stakeholders to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and skills, professional development, networking and the gaining of exposure to best practice in artistic and governance issues. Such an event would be most effective if the participation of all stakeholders mentioned in this document was ensured.

The establishment of a central reference point/database for all Irish choral compositions, historic and contemporary.

Develop the AOIC library as an accessible resource for member choirs covering a broad range of choral repertoire. Build this library strategically.

AOIC and CMC ought to consider embarking on a mentoring relationship where the acknowledged expertise of CMC in the area of web resources could be brought to bear on the work of AOIC.

The development of high-profile non-competitive choral performance opportunities, that offer good quality platforms for choirs from the amateur and schools sectors.

The choral sector would benefit from the implementation of a number of the Arts Council's stated aims in Partnership for the Arts. The establishment of a National Music Day would be a useful tool for the promotion of choral singing, and the full implementation of Music Network's education feasibility study: *A National System of Local Music Education Service Partnerships* would also benefit choral development.

#### 6.4.4 *Areas for further research*

Support and resources for the following research areas is recommended:

Contribute to research projects involving arts participation in immigrant communities.

Analyse the level of choral expertise among immigrants and propose pathways for integration of singers or choirs into the wider choral sector.

Examine the feasibility of a stand-alone opera chorus with up to 32 singers on retained contracts. Assess the extent of interaction that such a chorus could have with all Irish opera companies, and investigate the range of education, outreach, training and mentoring work that could be undertaken by such an ensemble.

Examine the feasibility of funding a retained orchestra which would work with a range of choirs throughout the country on an annual basis offering high artistic standards, flexibility of repertoire, adequate rehearsal time and professional development opportunities for choral conductors in advance of their working with this orchestra.

## SECTION 7

## ROLE OF OTHER ORGANISATIONS IN STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHORAL MUSIC SECTOR

### 7.1 Introduction

Ways in which other agencies and organisations could contribute to the future strategic development of the sector are outlined in this section. These organisations include Government Departments, State Agencies, Local Authorities and the education sector. The role to be played by the choral sector in its own strategic development is also outlined.

### 7.2 Partnership approach

Some of the suggested development objectives could be realised directly by these organisations, while others can be delivered in partnership with the Arts Council and others. The Arts Council has strong relationships with many of these organisations (particularly local authorities), but in other cases new relationships would need to be built. A Choral Policy Advisor (if appointed by the Arts Council) could work with these organisations to realise the goals outlined here and could assess the feasibility of bringing all relevant organisations together to develop a multi-agency choral development initiative similar to some of those which have taken place in other countries.<sup>9</sup>

The effective development of the choral sector goes beyond the work of the Arts Council and its client organisations, and future progress will be dependent on the strategic contribution of a range of other stakeholders. The potential role of these stakeholders is as follows:

### 7.3 Government Departments and state agencies

As outlined in Section 2, a significant number of government departments and state agencies currently have a role to play in the provision of supports to the choral sector. These Government Departments include Arts Sports and Tourism; Education and Science; Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Communications Energy and Natural Resources, Foreign Affairs, Department of Health and Children. Choral music making has the capacity to further contribute to the work of these Departments and other public bodies. For example, agencies of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs could use choral music as a socially inclusive and cohesive force in communities throughout all areas of Ireland.

9. See Note on International practice, Appendix 2.



In addition to the Arts Council, relevant State agencies and organisations that currently play a role in support of the choral sector include Culture Ireland, The National Concert Hall, RTÉ, and Local Authorities. The Arts Council and the choral sector are recommended to interact directly with all relevant organisations, and to seek greater resources and a higher profile for choral music within their area of operation. Specific supports that could be provided for further development of the choral sector by some of these organisations are as follows:

#### Culture Ireland

Culture Ireland has the capacity to develop international links and to raise the profile of the Irish choral sector through networking events, showcases, residencies, exchanges, and collaborations. Culture Ireland's support for choirs to perform abroad should be further developed.

#### National Concert Hall

The National Concert Hall (NCH) is the only state-supported venue in Ireland that is wholly dedicated to the promotion of music. It is one of the few venues that is particularly suitable for large-scale choral and orchestral performance and many choirs perform regularly in it. The popularity of the venue, however, has made securing a date for performances difficult. The costs associated with hiring the NCH are also high for many choirs.

In the shorter term choirs would like to see an analysis of how it might be made more feasible for them to present concerts in the NCH on a regular basis. The NCH, however, is planning an ambitious programme of expansion, moving from one auditorium to three with a larger and a smaller venue being added to the current hall. The flexibility and increased capacity offered by this initiative should offer greater opportunities for choirs of different sizes to be able to present concerts within the complex. It will be important to the choral sector that their views and needs are taken into consideration both in the physical redevelopment of the hall and in the programming and artistic policies of the newly revamped organisation.

#### RTÉ

While the RTÉ Philharmonic Choir performs regularly with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) in Dublin, audiences outside the capital do not have access to large-scale choral and orchestral performances. Touring NSO choral programmes would offer rich experiences to a wider audience. RTÉ could facilitate a higher profile for choral music in its broadcasting schedules. On radio, RTÉ Lyric FM could devote more specialised time to choral programming.

On television, new ideas are needed to address the almost complete absence of choral music. RTÉ also has a strong role to play through its financial support for the National Chamber Choir and through providing high-profile concert and broadcast opportunities for the NCC.

#### 7.4 Local authorities

A closer alignment of Arts Council and Local Authority policies would facilitate the development of a co-ordinated range of policies and programmes to engage and benefit the choral sector. In addition, the findings of this study indicate that the choral sector would welcome the following developments:

- Increased level of awareness between the choral sector and Local Authorities including a greater understanding of the possibilities of choral music in the delivery of local authority priorities in the arts.
- Greater the use of Percent for Art commissioning schemes for choral projects.
- Increased financial support for the choral sector through Arts Act grants, bursaries and other funding programmes.
- Support for the development of county youth choirs.
- Facilitating stronger local links between the education and choral sectors.
- Participation in the development of regional choral expert positions.
- Leadership in leveraging other local supports such as VECs, County Development Boards, music education service providers and other relevant bodies.
- Support for touring, particularly where international twinning programmes are in operation.
- Co-ordination and increased sharing of local resources and equipment

#### 7.5 The education sector

Many of the organisations and agencies within the formal education sector have, or could have, a role in the development of choral music. The Arts Council is urged to ensure it has the capacity to interact with these agencies to advocate for the promotion of choral music in the formal education sector.

Currently a range of partnerships exist between the choral and the education sectors, some involving local authorities. These partnerships, however, have been developed in the absence of a national policy for the arts in education. In the first half of 2007, a special committee (convened under the 2003 Arts Act) under the auspices of The Arts Council, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Department of Education and Science, examined the area of arts in education. The report *Points of Alignment* was published in July 2008. It is hoped that the implementation of the findings of this report will support development for the arts in education sector in ways that will be of particular significance for the choral sector.

There is unanimity within the choral sector that development of choral practice in schools is likely to be the most effective strategy for providing a long-term ground-up strategy for increasing participation in choral music. The following actions are also suggested as part of a multi-agency strategy of support for choral music.

#### Policy

- Begin building a multi-agency partnership between the formal education sector and the choral sector to plan for a national strategy of singing in schools similar to the “Sing Up” initiative in England or others outlined in the notes on international practice outlined in Appendix Two of this report.

#### Teacher training and ongoing professional development

- Instigate discussions with colleges of education and second-level music teacher education institutions to examine ways of advancing vocal and choral skills, artistic understanding and conducting training among trainee teachers at all levels.
- Advocate for sustained in-service training for primary and post-primary teachers in relation to choral music. Work with the Primary Curriculum Support Service towards the enhancement of the skills base of primary teachers. Investigate the feasibility of maintaining and enhancing the ‘cuiditheoir’ system (or similar support system) that facilitated the introduction of the new primary curriculum to ensure ongoing development of classroom teachers in relation to choral work.
- Work with the countrywide network of Education Centres towards the ongoing professional development of teachers. Investigate the feasibility of establishing Teacher Professional Networks in collaboration with Education Centres to facilitate the cross-fertilisation and enhancement of teachers’ skills.

### Primary and post-primary level

- Advocate for a higher profile of choral singing within school curricula and within school timetables where possible. Develop links with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment – contribute to any future curriculum development or reviews involving music.
- Work towards the official recognition and endorsement of skills-sharing schemes among primary school teachers and the engagement of outside choral specialists where necessary
- Liaise with the Second Level Support Service (SLSS), with the Department of Education and Science and the Post-Primary Music Teacher Association towards the prioritisation of music in the work of the SLSS.
- Initiate discussions with the Irish Primary Principals Network, the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, the Post-Primary Music Teachers Association, teachers' unions and the National Parents Council about the profile of choral music within schools

### Third level

- Initiate discussions with third-level education providers to analyse the feasibility of a full-time choral conducting course. Provide a range of supports through the work of Arts Council funded clients to add value to such a course.
- In conjunction with third-level music education providers, and other bodies such as the National Chamber Choir, investigate ways of advancing skills in ensemble vocal technique and musicianship.
- Support third-level music colleges and schools of music in the provision of public masterclasses, workshops or seminars focussed on ensemble singing and development of musicianship.

### Vocational Education Committees

As well as their involvement in the post primary education sector, the nationwide network of Vocational Education Committees (VECs) occupy an important role in the provision of a range of other education services, including vocational training and life-long learning. Their participation in locally based music education services, community based initiatives and their role in the training of choral singers and choral conductors could be developed in partnership with the choral sector.

### Life-long learning and community

- Investigate the feasibility of developing part-time courses in vocal technique and musicianship for non-professional singers wishing to improve their skills in conjunction with VECs or other life-long education providers.
- In addition to Arts Council support, county youth choirs would also benefit from support from the education sector – including schools, VECs, existing music education service providers and other relevant bodies.
- The full implementation of Music Networks 2003 Feasibility study - A National System of Local Music Education Services (which is a stated priority of the Arts Council within Partnership for the Arts In Practice 2006-2008), would provide additional supports for the development of both community based and in-school choral activity.

## 7.6 County/City Development Boards and Leader Organisations

All thirty-four local authority areas in Ireland also have County/City Development Boards (CDBs) and most also have Leader Organisations. CDBs prepare and oversee strategies for economic, social and cultural development and work closely with local authorities in the development of their areas. Leader organisations are part of an EU community initiative to develop the quality of life in rural areas. Choral music has the capacity to deliver on many of the stated objectives of these organisations, but the level of awareness between the choral sector and these development agencies is low. The Arts Council and the choral sector should engage with CBDs and Leader Organisations to explore common ground and to investigate potential partnerships in support of choral practice.

## 7.7 The choral sector

The amateur nature of a large part of the choral sector may contribute to the fact that it has in general been slow to engage in a thorough way with state agencies including the Arts Council. Some choirs (particularly larger ones) are governed by committees who lack the necessary skills for interacting with state agencies.

In order to play a full role in many of the developments outlined in this document, the choral sector will need to devote more time, energy and resources to interaction with the Arts Council, the Association of Irish Choirs, local authorities and other agencies.

- The choral sector should contribute regularly to policy development at national and local level and should interact with The Arts Council and Local Authorities in the creation of arts plans, strategies and policies.
- The choral sector needs to take a proactive approach to availing of new supports as they emerge.
- In many cases choirs and individual practitioners need to devote more time to planning, project development, partnership building, networking and accessing resources. These activities need as much attention as the choral endeavour itself and should be approached in a sustained and systematic way.
- Choirs should be encouraged and facilitated to market their work more effectively and increase the visibility of their activities.
- The choral sector would benefit from looking outside of Ireland to gain insights and inspiration, and to develop its practice making full use of the international resources available.
- Choirs and choral practitioners should maintain ongoing close relationships with state bodies including the Arts Council.

## RAISING YOUR VOICE – AN INITIAL ARTS COUNCIL RESPONSE

### Introduction

The Arts Council's initial response to *Raising Your Voice* follows in this section of the report.

### Responding to the findings of the report

At its Plenary meeting held in June 2008, the Arts Council carefully considered the Report, *Raising your Voice* - Towards a policy for the development of choral music in Ireland. In considering the Report, the Council noted the significance of the issues raised and gave a warm welcome to the manner in which so many individuals and organisations within the choral sector, both amateur and professional, had engaged directly with the consultation process on which the Report's findings are based.

The Council noted that the Report represented a specific response to the commitment it made in *Partnership for the Arts in practice 2006- 2008* to identify national policy gaps affecting music and take a lead in formulating responses in partnership with organisations and voices from all areas of musical practice.

Having taken into account the very broad range of issues raised and the recommendations contained within the Report, the Arts Council adopted the recommendations outlined in *Raising Your Voice* in principle. The Council believes that these broad-ranging recommendations offer a clear guide as to the supports required to effect longer term development of choral music in Ireland.

However, in order to maximise the value of the Report's findings, it was further decided that, subject to the availability of resources, the Council would prioritise a small number of recommendations from within the Report for implementation in the short to medium term.

### Priority recommendations

Following the pattern established within the Report itself, these priority recommendations are grouped in two categories: *within existing resources* and *requiring additional resources*. The third area of the Report's findings, areas for further research, will be considered at a later date.



## Within Existing Resources

| Priority Recommendations  | Possible implementation strategies  |
|---|---|
| Prioritise professional development of conductors and singers within choirs                                       | Use existing Arts Council awards and funding schemes to actively encourage the professional development of choral practitioners, e.g. proposals from amateur choirs seeking to engage specialist expertise for well conceived development projects. |
| Prioritise quality choral music proposals and proposals for repertoire development                                | Within the context of current funding programmes, actively encourage applications which present either quality professional choral music proposals or strong proposals for repertoire development within amateur choirs.                            |
| Develop a dynamic choral resource organisation.   | Strategically develop a choral resource organisation to be a dynamic resource to the sector and to deliver on key Arts Council priorities for choral music development.   |
| Encourage festivals, venues and promoters to actively participate in the ongoing development of the choral sector | Through advocacy and awareness raising, encourage Arts Council client organisations to include choral music in their programmes of activities.  |
| Proactively encourage a wide range of choirs and organisations to commission new choral music                     | Proactively encourage professional, amateur, school and church choirs, festivals, promoters and venues to commission new choral works via the Arts Council's Commissioning scheme.  |

## Requiring New Resources

| Priority Recommendations                                    | Possible implementation strategies   |
|---|--|
| Develop a high quality professional chamber choir           | Prioritise increased funding to the level required to enable a high quality professional chamber choir to reach its full potential as a national choral institution.   |
| Dedicated funding for outsourced schemes for amateur choirs | Create a dedicated scheme to offer choirs a contribution to costs associated with: hiring of skills/expertise; developing skills of singers; repertoire expansion and touring within Ireland. If necessary, outsource operation of the scheme to an appropriate resource organisation. |
| Support for Youth Choirs                                    | Develop a policy to support a network of county-based, professionally managed youth choirs to strategically develop choral skills during the critical years of musical development.  |
| Publishing and Recording of Irish Choral Music              | Support the publication and recording of Irish choral music.   |

The Arts Council

*October 2008*

## APPENDIX 1

**CONTRIBUTORS TO CHORAL POLICY DOCUMENT**

The following people contributed to the formulation of this policy paper by attendance at focus group meetings or by means of written submissions to the process:

|                    |   |
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| Noel Reid             | Major Dublin Choir Groups                                      |
| John Ryan             | Sligo Choral Festival  |
| Ray Ryan              | Firhouse Singers   |
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## NOTES FROM INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

### Introduction

To provide a context for the analysis of the choral sector in Ireland, research was commissioned into aspects of choral practice in some other European countries. This research was undertaken by Catja Gaebel, International Cooperation and Development Manager of Athelas Sinfonietta in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The research primarily focussed on England, Germany, Denmark and Estonia. It was not within the scope of the research to offer a complete analysis of all aspects of choral music within these countries, but it attempted to offer insights and ideas covering a range of different features of choral life in them.

A series of snapshots of this research are presented in this note which have relevance for some of the issues raised elsewhere in this document. It must be stressed, however, that direct comparisons between choral practice in one country and another are particularly difficult to make, as each country, including Ireland, has a unique set of circumstances from history, culture, religion, government policies, education priorities, and a range of arts practices that are not easily compared between them.

### England

England's choral system is very different from that of Ireland's and from some of the other countries featured in this research. The Arts Council England offers few direct supports to choirs, but the choral world operates within a much more developed musical infrastructure, which makes many other initiatives possible.

This infrastructure includes full time professional choruses of the major opera companies and the BBC Singers, the only publicly funded professional choir – which is entirely funded by the BBC. England's church music infrastructure is very strongly developed with an array of high quality professional church and cathedral choirs. Most publicly subsidised orchestras also retain high-quality amateur choruses while independent choral societies have centuries of tradition. There are a wide range of specialist promoters, venues and festivals that interact with the choral world. Recording and publication of choral music has also been a major industry in England since the technologies became available.

Youth Music is a highly developed resource organisation which distributes £10 million funding to youth organisations from the National Lottery on behalf of the Arts Council England. Although not exclusively concerned with choirs, choral music does feature strongly within its remit. Youth Music provides funding to organisations working

outside the formal education sector. It seeks to work strategically, supports training, has a strong role as an advocate, conducts extensive research and evaluation, and works in partnership with others. Youth Music's five priority areas are: Early Years, Singing, Transition, At Risk and Workforce Development.

On a sustained basis over many generations, choral music has been very well supported through the English education system. Throughout the 1990s, however, commentators have increasingly pointed to a perceived de-prioritisation of music in schools. In an initiative to counteract this, two government departments came together with a range of stakeholders from the music sector to announce the Music Manifesto (2004). This manifesto is a pledge to make music central in education. It was developed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, representatives of the music industry and other agencies such as the Musicians' Union, the Teacher Training Agency, the Specialist Schools Trust, Arts Council England, Qualification and Curriculum Authority, Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Youth Music, MTV and the BBC. The Music Manifesto aims to provide every young person with access to music, to increase skills, to nurture talented young musicians, to develop teachers and to improve support structures. It includes all genres and types of music, but singing and choral music is an important feature. The Music Manifesto pledged to commit £180 million by 2008. It was broadly welcomed by the music sector, although some voices saw it as not going far enough and not having sufficient resources.

The work of the Music Manifesto has led to the initiative *Sing Up* (2007) which is exclusively focussed at developing choral music in primary schools and at pre-school level. This programme provides an interesting template for the effective bringing together of partners from throughout the choral world with the formal education sector. *Sing Up* has received £10 million funding from the UK's Department of Education and Skills. It is being led by a consortium including Youth Music, the Sage Gateshead, publisher Faber Music and advertising agency Abbot Mead Vickers. It also involves choral practitioners from all walks of life. It will involve new publication, media campaign and a workforce development programme to build skills among teachers and parents. It has developed ideas and resources that could be effectively applied elsewhere.

The Association of British Choral Directors (ABCD) is a highly valued organisation that operates a wide range of supports and networking opportunities for choral conductors.

As well as online resources, ABCD runs an annual convention which features training for conductors, discussion forums, trade exhibitions, concerts, open rehearsals and many other activities. It also runs annual conducting summer courses and has strong links to other resource agencies. ABCD is funded entirely from membership fees.

The development of choral practice at all levels in the UK is significantly more advanced than in Ireland. The fact that a culturally and geographically close country, which speaks the same language, has such developed thinking, resources and programmes in operation should be seen as a strong potential asset in Ireland's drive to promote choral music.

## Germany

The largest choral resource organisation in Germany, the German Choral Association has 27,000 member choirs with 750,000 singers. Other smaller agencies represent a further 360,000 singers. Out of a total population of 82 million people, this represents between 5 and 6 times the estimated rate of choral participation than in Ireland. Funding opportunities exist for choirs on a federal, state and local level.

The German Choral Association (GCA) actively promotes the composition and the performance of contemporary choral music. Among many other programmes, the GCA also runs an annual choral conductors conference with opportunities for education and training. They particularly prioritise training of young emerging conductors. They also offer training in management and administration of choirs. GCA is involved in choral sheet-music publication, it produces a monthly choral magazine and a yearly choral handbook. The GCA also offers a choral advice telephone hotline.

The GCA prioritises choral music within education and youth sectors, as well as in life-long learning contexts. GCA's programmes for the development of choral music include the following range of areas:

- Zwergenmusik (Gnome music) for parents and children under 18 months
- Liedergarten (Song garden) for early kindergarten years
- Felix – Kindergarten musical accreditation programme involving training for kindergarten teachers as well as inspection and accreditation of kindergarten choral programmes. In 2006 Felix won a major federal award.
- Liederkalender (Song Calendar) for primary schools offering new songs every month for pdf download (currently more than 10,000 downloads per month)
- A range of programmes which fund outside choral experts working in schools
- Youth choirs outside of school contexts
- Integration of young singers into adult choirs with a structured programme of passing direction and administration of choirs to younger members



- Project choirs for adults with young families who cannot sustain ongoing full time membership of a choir
- Support for a wide range of adult amateur choirs
- Senior choirs for older singers whose voices, health or lifestyle cannot sustain participation in regular choirs, but who wish to continue participation at a different level.

German Music Council is a federal level agency – the largest cultural association in Germany. It's principal support for amateur music is the German Choir Contest – held every 4 years and German Orchestra Contest (for amateur orchestras). This state-funded competition includes conductor training workshops and measures to promote contemporary music. Scholarships for conductors are awarded and competitions are held for composers to receive commissions. State level competitions are also important.

Competitions receive strong coverage in federal and state media. *Deutschland sucht den "Lieblingschor"* (Germany seeks its favourite choir) is a major TV competition for choirs and is very popular with audiences.

## Denmark

It is estimated that in the region of 80,000 people regularly participate in choirs in Denmark. With a population of 5.5 million this represents approximately six times the estimated rate of participation in Ireland.

The Danish Arts Council, as well as having a range of funding programmes for professional organisations, has two programmes of particular interest to the choral sector: The first focuses on youth – offering funding to particularly talented children and to children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The second focuses on amateur organisations. It sets the following parameters: Support for professional direction of amateur groups, collaborations between composers and amateur choirs or ensembles, courses for conductors within amateur music. This scheme (with a budget of €844,000) is operated by Danish Amateur Music Union.

Both the Danish Amateur Music Union (DAMU) and the Danish Amateur Choral Union (DAKU) are strong resource organisations that have had a significant effect on government policy. Among the many other activities of DAMU are the provision of courses in management for committees of amateur organisations. DAKU offers web resources such as a conductor bank of 200 conductors, details of upcoming events, international links, and they also offer free access to a professional consultant to offer advice to amateur choral committees. DAKU will host the World Symposium on Choral Music in Copenhagen on 19-26 July 2008. The 98 Danish municipalities also support choral activities on amateur and professional level.

Within the education sector, the 2006 report *“The Ildsjæl (Fiery Soul) in the Classroom”* was commissioned by both the Danish Ministry of Culture and the Danish Ministry of Education. The publication of this report has led to the current focus on children and young people. The review outlined how choral activities are no longer part of the curriculum in primary or secondary schools, and have been replaced largely with an increased emphasis on maths and physics. Voluntary choirs still exist in most schools, but the position of choral singing has been eroded. The report drew a direct link between the downgrading of arts education and the decrease in overall literacy and numeracy in Danish Schools.

As a result of review, Arts Education has regained momentum in Denmark. One of the most visible initiatives to arise from the review is *Sangens År* (Year of Song) 2008. This project is large-scale and wide-ranging – and is supported by among others the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture and the Danish broadcasting corporation DR and a range of choral practitioners. Year of Song 2008 is a nationwide focus on singing, designed to get Danes singing again, to strengthen integration and to protect the cultural heritage represented by Danish song and community singing. It is accompanied by a major PR campaign.

Year of Song 2008 has three particular areas of focus; Children & Youth, everyday life (designed to promote singing at work and undertaken in collaboration with the business sector) and integration of new cultures. Year of Song is not unique, it is based on a template which has already been successfully carried out in Norway and Finland.

## Estonia

Estonia has a population less than 1.5 million, of whom around 30,000 sing in 1,000 choirs on a regular basis. This represents approximately eight times the Irish participation rate in choral singing.

Choral singing is uniquely part of the culture, history and national identity of Estonia. The first ever Estonian Song Celebration took place in Tartu in 1869. In folk culture this has often been portrayed as an event whereby the pagan Estonians sang themselves into a “civilised nation”.

In more recent times, Estonians refer to the “singing revolution” from 1987 to 1991 where mass political demonstrations of up to 300,000 people singing took place in Tallinn, in events that are seen to have contributed to Estonia’s eventual independence. The Estonian Song Celebration, which began in 1869, is still in existence and it takes place every 5 years. In fact it is the largest regular public event in Estonia with audiences of between 100,000 and 150,000. Up to 19,000 of the participants are

youth performers. The Estonian Song Celebration is hosted by the “Estonian National Committee on the Safeguarding and Revitalising of the National Song and Dance Celebration Tradition”

Estonia is not the only country to hold such a celebration. All three Baltic States, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia each hold National Song and Dance Celebrations. Since the break up of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Baltic States, however, these celebrations have come under threat as rural areas in particular have become depopulated and many amateur groups have been disbanded. A pan-Baltic initiative with the collaboration of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has been put in place to ensure the preservation of this tradition.

The Estonian Ministry of Culture has recently published a new strategy for 2008 – 2011 and this document emphasises the importance of choral singing. Choral music and the arts in general are seen as important tools to counteract emigration and depopulation – trends which have the potential to threaten the viability of this small country. The implementation section of the new strategy contains plans to improve national support system for choirs and traditional dance groups.

Choral music in Estonia is seen as part of traditional culture. In 2007 traditional music and dance organisations taken together have been supported by the Ministry of Culture by 1,213 grants with a total value €1,150,000. This budget is set to rise to over €1.5m in 2008.

In the professional sector, the jewel in Estonia’s crown is the 28-member Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (EPCC) which is a world-leading ensemble and a recent recipient of a prestigious American Grammy Award (2007). The EPCC receives 80% of its budget from the government – singers are paid salaries directly from State. In addition to the EPCC, the state also supports two professional opera choruses and the State Male Voice Choir. There are also a number of project-based professional choirs. The Estonian Radio Choir ceased to exist in the mid 1990s.

More than 60% of choirs in Estonia are youth or school choirs. Choral activity, however, is not part of the formal curriculum in schools but virtually all schools see it as important addition to formal studies. Typically local authorities fund the costs of the choral conductors working in schools.

The Estonian Choral Association (ECA) is a vibrant resource organisation which provides national leadership for choirs, develops choirs artistically, organises summer seminars for choral conductors and offers a range of awards to conductors. Currently ECA is

examining ways of making the profession of choral conducting more attractive so that young entrants are attracted to it and can earn a living from it.

Few links between the amateur and professional sectors exist in Estonia, although the EPCC does take part in the Estonian Song Celebration. Many commentators lament the perceived low level of choral training in third level conservatories of music, although this difficulty is likely to be counteracted to a significant extent by the range of youth choir initiatives in existence in Estonia.

## Latvia

One striking aspect of choral life in Latvia worthy of note is the level of engagement of professional choral singers. Latvia, with a population of 2.25 million, supports the following state-funded full time professional choirs: Latvian National Opera Chorus (60 singers), Latvian State Choir (52 singers), Latvian Radio Choir (24 singers) Riga Municipal Choir (24 singers). So, altogether 160 full time professional singers are employed by state supported choirs. In addition there are other part time and project based professional choirs exist outside Riga – often receiving local municipal funding.

By comparison Irish state funding provides no full time jobs for singers. The equivalent of 8.5 whole-time equivalent posts are provided in the National Chamber Choir and roughly 10 whole time equivalent posts exist in both Opera Ireland and Wexford Festival Opera taken together (a total of 11.5% of the available posts in Latvia).

It is also worth noting that World Bank Development Indicators (2005 figures – measured in US\$) estimate the income per capita in Ireland to be \$40,150 while that of Latvia is \$6,760

## Summary

To provide a context for the analysis of the choral sector in Ireland aspects of choral practice in some European countries, particularly England, Germany, Denmark and Estonia were examined. Of these four countries the role of the state seems to be strongest in Estonia, while independent resource organisations appear to be strongest in Germany. The English and Danish models, intermediate between these, seem to reflect higher levels of collaboration between government, agencies and music practitioners and resource organisations.

Despite the strength of the choral tradition in England the priority given to music in schools began to decline in the 1990's. To counter this the Music Manifesto, developed by two government departments, representatives of the music industry and various other agencies, was announced in 2004. Singing and choral music were important features of the Manifesto. The work of the Manifesto resulted in the initiative *Sing Up* (2007), focussed on developing choral music in primary schools and at pre-school

level. It involves a wide array of practitioners and will generate new publications, media campaigns and education/training to build the skills of teachers and parents.

In Germany the participation rate in choral music is estimated to be between five and six times that of Ireland. The largest choral resource organisation in Germany, the German Choral Association, promotes the composition and performance of contemporary choral music. It provides education and training in conducting, management and administration. It prioritises choral music within the education, youth and life-long learning sectors, and provides a wide range of supports. In Germany there are funding opportunities for choirs at federal, state and local level. The German Music Council, a federal agency, supports the four-yearly German Choir Contest. This competition provides conductor workshops and scholarships, promotes contemporary music, and commissions composers.

As in Germany, choral music in Denmark is strongly supported by a resource organisation, the Danish Amateur choral Union (DAKU). While the estimated participation rate in choral singing in Denmark is similar to Germany's it was observed in the 2006 report *The Ildsjael* (Fiery Soul) *in the Classroom* that choral music in Denmark's classrooms was in decline (as in England). The *Sangen Års* (Year of Song) 2008, a major response to this observation, is a nationwide focus on singing to strengthen integration and protect cultural heritage. It has three particular areas of focus: children and youth, everyday life and integration of new cultures.

Estonia has even higher rates of participation in choral singing than Denmark and Germany, estimated to be eight times that of Ireland. However, like Denmark and England it has encountered threats to this activity, though for different reasons; there rural depopulation has resulted in the loss of many amateur groups. In Estonia choral singing is viewed as a substantial part of traditional culture and national identity, and the Ministry for Culture has published a strategy for 2008-2011 that acknowledges this. The strategy identifies choral music and the arts in general as important tools for counteracting emigration and depopulation. In addition a pan-Baltic initiative (with the support of UNESCO) has been introduced to preserve choral music throughout the Baltic region.

## APPENDIX 3

### FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

The following focus group meetings were held as part of the process leading to the drafting of this policy paper:

|                    |          |  |
|--------------------|----------|--|
| March 28th 2007    | Dublin   | Initial discussion raising points for further deliberation |
| May 30th 2007      | Dublin   | Focus group on choral leadership and artistic policy       |
| May 30th 2007      | Dublin   | Focus group on education and youth                         |
| May 31st 2007      | Dublin   | Focus group on resources and services                      |
| May 31st 2007      | Dublin   | Focus group on Arts Council choral policy                  |
| December 5th 2007  | Sligo    | Presentation of issues in draft document and discussion    |
| December 6th 2007  | Galway   | Presentation of issues in draft document and discussion    |
| December 10th 2007 | Dublin   | Presentation of issues in draft document and discussion    |
| December 11th 2007 | Cork     | Presentation of issues in draft document and discussion    |
| December 13th 2007 | Kilkenny | Presentation of issues in draft document and discussion    |

## APPENDIX 4

## ABOUT THE REPORT AUTHOR

Fergus Sheil is both a practicing musician and an arts consultant. He studied music in Trinity College Dublin where he specialised in composition, graduating in 1992. As a conductor he has worked with many of Ireland's leading music organisations including the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, the Ulster Orchestra, the Irish Chamber Orchestra, Crash Ensemble, the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Opera Ireland, Wexford Festival Opera, Opera Theatre Company and Lyric Opera Productions. He previously worked as chorus master for Wexford Festival Opera, Opera Ireland and Scottish Opera and has worked with a large number of choirs throughout Ireland. Internationally he has fulfilled engagements in the UK, Holland, Estonia, Denmark, Sweden, the USA, South Africa and Australia.

Especially committed to contemporary music Fergus Sheil has collaborated with major Irish and international composers and has conducted the premiere of 30 new works. Notably in 2008 he directed the world premiere of Arvo Pärt's *The Deer's Cry* (commissioned by the Louth Contemporary Music Society) in concerts with the Latvian State Choir in Drogheda and Dundalk. As an arts consultant Fergus Sheil worked as Music Specialist to The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon from 2004 – 2007. He has subsequently offered advice to a significant number of clients within the arts sector including the Association of Irish Choirs, the Contemporary Music Centre, Sligo County Council and Carlow County Council.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Arts Council would like to thank the following for their contribution to Raising Your Voice: the many stakeholders and practitioners in the choral music sector who participated in the consultation meetings and process; Rosaleen Molloy (Arts Officer, Wexford County Council) Bernie Sherlock (Choral Conductor and Lecturer, DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama) and Liz Powell (Choral Conductor, Chair of the Association of Irish Choirs) for their inputs into an initial discussion document, Catja Gaebel, International Cooperation Manager of Athelas Sinfonietta, Copenhagen who undertook international research, Fergus Sheil, Music Specialist, who wrote the report; Rosemary Collier, Head of Music and Opera in the Arts Council, who guided the work; Sue Leigh-Doyle, consultant research advisor who edited this report.





