

# **Creative Scotland, Youth Music Initiative**

## **Case Study – Traditional Music Making in Highland**



### **About this case study**

This case study was developed as part of Creative Scotland's evaluation of the Youth Music Initiative in 2014/15. The Youth Music Initiative is a national programme which is in its 12<sup>th</sup> year of operation. These case studies demonstrate the approaches used by organisations funded by the Youth Music Initiative, and highlight the impacts of this work.

This case study is about traditional music making in Highland. It is one of four Youth Music Initiative programmes that operate in Highland. In 2014/15, the project received £219,511 from the Youth Music Initiative fund allocated to The Highland Council. This project has been running since 2006.

The traditional music programme provides 12 hours of traditional and Gaelic music and song to every primary school across the Highland Council region. Fèis Rois, an organisation which specialises in Traditional and Gaelic music, song and culture, deliver part of this Youth Music Initiative programme in Highland under contract to Fèisean nan Gàidheal. Fèis Rois co-ordinates the programme in 105 of the 176 primary schools in the region with 4 other Fèisean co-ordinating the programme in schools in their local area.

This case study was developed through discussions with tutors, staff and pupils in the Fèis Rois YMI area along with Fèis Rois and Highland Council.

### **The approach**

The aim of this project is to provide P5 pupils with a high quality experience of Traditional and Gaelic music through song, group music making and tin whistle.

The intended outcomes for the project are to:

- expose pupils to Traditional, Scots and Gaelic music and song;
- develop young people's music skills, including rhythm and pitch as well as enhancing key life skills;

- enhance understanding of Scottish culture and heritage through song and music;
- ensure every P5 pupil experiences live traditional music or song; and
- provide access to musicians who are professionals in their field and passionate about delivering participatory music in schools.



Schools participate in two blocks of six weekly one hour sessions aimed at Primary 5 pupils (approximately 2,868 P5 pupils each year). This programme is delivered by freelance professional musicians and singers who are experienced in working in participatory settings.

In advance of the sessions schools are asked to provide class details, availability and topics. This information is used to form both the project timetable and aid in the tutor in their preparation. Where appropriate the musicians will link material with the class topic. For example, if a class is studying the Jacobites the musicians can teach songs from that period.

There are strong links to the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Music outcomes and experiences as well as links to the wider curriculum. Schools are provided with information about the programme which includes details of the CfE and Four Capacity outcomes the project normally meets.

**“There is such great reward in witnessing shy individuals blossom into confident youngsters... their pride in what they have achieved in six short weeks can be humbling.”**

#### **Curriculum for Excellence Music Outcomes and Experiences**

- I can sing and play music from a range of styles and cultures, showing skill and using performance direction, and / or musical notation.
- I can use my voice, musical instruments and music technology to experiment with sound, rhythm, pitch, melody, timbre and dynamics.
- Inspired by a range of stimuli, and working on my own and/or with others, I can express and communicate my ideas, thoughts and feelings through musical activities.
- I have listened to a range of music and can respond by discussing my thoughts and feelings. I can give and accept constructive comment on my own and others' work.

## **Activities**

Activities include; Scots, traditional and Gaelic singing, group music making and tin whistle instruction. Schools are asked to choose their preference for each block at the start of the academic year. Sessions are very interactive and dynamic, getting

pupils to move around the room and work together. Tutors sing and play a variety of instruments, including the guitar, fiddle, accordion and piano and as part of the project they expose the pupils to live music. Tutors often have no knowledge of the pupils' musical ability before the class therefore all pupils start at the same level.

Pupils already receiving instrumental tuition are encouraged to play their instruments in group music workshops. This allows them to explore a genre of music they might not usually play as well as integrating their musical talent and knowledge into the class sessions.

**“There is a great variety of skills among the YMI tutors, both in terms of experience of different instruments and musical skills, so the kids get super variety.”**

The traditional music tutors are professional musicians and the majority are not registered with the General Teaching Council, therefore class teachers are required to be present and are encouraged to join in.

In the situation where a school has a composite class, the whole class will participate in the traditional music making sessions.

In some schools, traditional music making is run as part of a wider enterprise project, where the pupils record themselves and produce audio CDs of their work. This allows the pupils more input into the planning and delivery of the sessions.

## **Support and training**

Fèisean nan Gàidheal host an annual traditional YMI meeting for tutors prior to the start of the programme. This includes topics such as safe guarding, class management, project updates, repertoire sharing and also allows tutors to raise any queries. This is also an opportunity to obtain tutor feedback and for them to share ideas and thoughts on the programme.

Throughout the year tutors delivering the programme can also access training sessions run by both Highland Council and Fèis Rois. They include courses such as “Music for the Deaf” and “Working with Children with Autism in a Musical Context”. The tutors who had previously attended these courses were extremely positive about them.

**“It was an enlightening morning, full of sound advice and has me inspired to make more of my freelance portfolio here in the Highlands.”**

Many of the tutors have been delivering the traditional music element of the Youth Music Initiative in Highland since 2006, and felt that support and training opportunities has improved over the years.

Fèis Rois has also put in place a trainee tutor programme. It is currently in the early stages of development and involves mentoring of trainees with a period of reflection and evaluation. Trainees work alongside experienced tutors and also have the opportunity to shadow other YMI tutors in order to develop a variety of tutoring

techniques and approaches and time to build up inspiring, age appropriate, repertoire. In 2014/15, there were two trainees within this programme.

## **Impact on children and young people**

As part of their role Fèis Rois undertakes an evaluation at the end of every 12 week block of traditional music making in the schools they co-ordinate. The class teachers complete an evaluation form and asks the pupils for comments to include. This approach has worked well and often schools additionally send in letters and photos about their experience of the programme.

We spoke with four young people directly after their traditional music making session at a local primary school for this case study. All were very positive about their experiences of traditional music making. The young people particularly liked the variety of instruments involved in their lessons.

**“I like it. It’s more active and fun and you play all different types of instruments.”**



This group of pupils said that taking part in the traditional music making lessons had made a difference to them by improving their musical skills and their range of musical knowledge.

**“It’s made us better at singing.”**

**“With Fèis Rois, you always learn something new.”**

One parent also said that the lessons had helped to encourage children to practice their musical instruments at home.

It was felt that the programme gives pupils access to types of music that they might not have experienced otherwise. People involved in planning the Youth Music Initiative in Highland reported that as a direct result of having traditional musicians into the class new pupils have attended Fèis Rois Oigridh – a week of traditional and Gaelic music delivered during the school holidays.

**“Although the project is short – it gives an important taster of traditional music.”**

Tutors and teachers also felt that the lessons encouraged young people to become more involved in learning generally. For example, tutors felt that having male tutors involved in delivering the programme helped to encourage boys to become involved – despite some being initially reticent.

## **Impact on deliverers and the music sector**

The tutors involved in delivering the traditional music making sessions said that they had benefitted from working in schools, which they described as a “more formal environment” than they might normally work in. Many of the tutors do not have a formal teaching qualification and said that they were able to learn different techniques and standards of teaching from working closely with class teachers. They were also able to pick up wider skills such as planning which they felt were important skills for working with young people. Teachers felt that the tutors were able to share new skills with them as well.

**“The tutors bring a wealth of knowledge...personally, I have learned such a lot from the tutors in their approach and have been able to use some of their activities in my own classes.”**

In addition, the wider youth music sector was thought to also benefit from the traditional music making programme. YMI provides employment for musicians, many of whom go onto deliver other projects in the community as well. It has allowed tutors the opportunity to work together and network with other musicians with different specialties or interests.

**“It is fantastic to be party to the YMI all these years. Not only do I get the privilege to do what I love and pass on my knowledge and skills to the next generation, but it provides me with regular daytime employment.”**

There were also examples of pupils sharing what they had learned during the traditional music making class with their parents and grandparents, who often recognised the songs. Tutors and teachers also reported hearing the children out in the playground or wider community with their families, singing the songs from class.

**“We’re pleased with the intergenerational spread of involvement and how it is raising the profile of Scots and traditional music in the wider community.”**

## **Successes**

Key successes of this programme include:

- pupils being exposed to different types of music;
- pupils and teachers working with professional musicians and experiencing different approaches to music;
- increased professional respect between YMI tutors and instrumental teachers;
- the introduction of music making on a ‘level playing field’ so that all the pupils are starting from the same level, making the sessions more inclusive; and
- pupils signing up to other traditional music holiday projects out with school time.

It was felt that the one of the key successes of the traditional music making programme was its flexibility. The programme allows each tutor to tailor their approach and material in order to engage the pupils. The six week block of tuition

was felt to be enough time for the pupils to have a good grasp of the subject, without losing focus.

**“We so look forward to your visits. YMI is the only exposure to music the children here get.”**

## **What next?**

As an organisation Fèis Rois will continue to support the ongoing training of musicians to enable more professional artists to work on the YMI programme. Fèis Rois would like to see the continued development of this programme of music and for every child in Scotland have the opportunity to explore and participate in traditional music.

**“We would like to do more of the same.”**

