



MAHOGANY OPERA

**SNAPPY OPERAS
YEAR TWO EVALUATION REPORT**

MAY 2018



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SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Snappy Operas is an opera making project with young people aged 7-11 delivered in ten regions of England between autumn 2016 and spring 2018. Teams of opera professionals worked with classes to create 10 minute operas, which were rehearsed and performed by a wider group of schools. The new commissions will be placed online and so made available for an even wider group of schools.

Mahogany Opera Group worked with, and was partly reliant on, local partners such as music hubs.

OUTPUTS

Snappy Operas ambitious targets were fulfilled in almost every area, with 50 schools/classes (target 50 across two years); 720 children (target 750 school children); 44 teachers and partners attending the CPD (target 50 across two years) and 1,704 audience members (target 4,000 across two years).

EVALUATION BRIEF

Annabel Jackson Associates Ltd was appointed in October 2017.

The evaluation brief was to help capture learning from the first year so that the model of Snappy Operas could be tested and refined; to provide a narrative across the two years; and also to build evaluative capacity in Mahogany Opera Group and strengthen its systems to improve project delivery and understanding of the impact of the work on audiences, participants, communities and the sector for funders and other stakeholders. As well as this report, we produced an evaluation note and delivered a training session.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation methodology consisted of:

- Creation of a logic model with the team.
- Baseline survey of teachers.
- Creation of, and analysis of observation questionnaires.
- Project end survey of teachers.
- Case study of one school.
- Creation of, and analysis of, a learning questionnaire for pupils.
- Online survey of artists.
- Online survey of creative leaders.

This is a relatively detailed evaluation given the scale of the project and is designed to illustrate different methods for Mahogany Opera Group, to help with future learning.

SNAPPY OPERAS MODEL

The Snappy Operas model has these special features:

- **Collaborative.** Music hubs and other regional partners help select the schools and manage the relationship.
- **Contemporary.** The commission asks for an original work that is ten minutes long, without solos, with parts for three groups, scored for piano and up to two instruments. The commissions are intended to be scaleable for different group sizes, and assume low levels of existing musical training in the performers.
- **Co-created.** The artists observe and interact with the young people. Young people gain by seeing and being part of the creative process. Artists gain by seeing reactions from young people. Everyone gains from a higher quality product judged in terms of relevance.
- **Attentive.** The groups are sometimes working with four professionals in the room – an exceptionally high student to teacher ratio.
- **Experiential.** Young people learn by doing. Creative leaders act as role models for creative teams: where different views are discussed robustly and respectfully, where individuality is celebrated, where the process embodies self-discipline, focus and concentration. The creative leader uses the language of the rehearsal room e.g. referring to the stage, cast.
- **Accessible.** The creative leader ensures that all young people in the class can take part. Everyone is equal.
- **Reciprocal.** The process is two way. Teachers gain CPD and also organised some of the rehearsals and costume production.

CONCLUSIONS

MOG have created an exceptional product: making opera a contemporary, creative and professional experience.

The delivery of the product is exceptional. MOG has highly skilled project management for a programme that is challenging because of its complexity and spatial spread.

“Organising such a mammoth of a project, with all of the different components and different regions and some performances even occurring simultaneously, I feel that the Snappy Opera Team pulled it off with aplomb.” Artist

“The way the artists and the organisation as a whole works with the schools is special. Even though each school is just one of 25 across the country, it still feels that each school is special - the artists are committed to doing the best for every child.” Partner

The overall package, including the online resource, makes the project strong value for money and impactful. The online resources were used to clarify roles, to review the score, to allow students to rehearse independently, to support teacher-led sessions, and thus to make the best of the time in the workshops.

Students gain an immersive experience, working alongside a team of industry professionals who are also highly skilled facilitators.

“It gives the children a chance to perform opera in an accessible way. But it isn’t talking down to them. It uses the language of opera.” Teacher

The students describe their experience in highly positive terms. Particular features are:

- The sessions were such fun that learning seemed easy or effortless.
- The sessions encouraged children to work together in a more natural way but also deeper way than in class, where relationships can be overly competitive.
- Children felt that they could affect the direction of the sessions more than in class and that their ideas were incorporated, often in an improved or combined format, that honoured their contribution.

“All our opinions are valued with Snappy Operas. Just because we are kids doesn’t mean we can’t have opinions. They take our ideas and make them better. The kids feel they are valued not just the teachers. It is your performance.” Student

“This was definitely a collaborative devising process, with many of the ideas coming out of our R and D sessions with the young people, specifically the character groups - their names, characteristics and behaviour, the setting of the piece (at the bottom of the ocean at the beating heart of the world), and particularly the emotional nuance of the work - the arc from repressed emotion to free expression.” Artist

- The sessions generally matched students’ learning styles: they liked being active rather than, as they described it, copying words from a screen in class.

“When I was doing Snappy Operas I was set free.” Student

“You are more free to do more things that you would like than if you would in a class. You can walk around. You get to stand on stage and do fun warm ups.” Student

- Children enjoyed and gained from the performance, including the use of props and costumes.

“When you wear the costume you feel as if you are a real person from the olden times.”
“The costumes show who you are and helps with the acting. You don’t have to pretend, you are that character.” Student

- The intensity of the workshops encouraged concentration.

“You can’t just sit down and day dream, there is always something to do, a lot to remember, which keeps you focused you are working hard but not stressed. You see people smiling and it makes you happy.” Student

- Children changed their preconceptions about opera, where they had any. In particular they valued opera more once they saw that it including acting, moving and narrative.

“Before we did Snappy Operas I thought opera would be quite boring and not much dance. Now we have done it, I would like to see it because I realise there is a meaning behind the songs and I can try and figure it out and it is like a game.” Student

“I think that opera would be more about telling a story, not just singing. Because singing randomly doesn’t matter. If you sing and act and make a story, it is likely the audience will be more engaged.” Student

- Children appreciated the time to focus on the work because this intensity was developmental, they could make mistakes and adjust, which they felt deepened learning.

“You don’t get a choice in class: you have to stick to one piece of work and then you have to finish it. In Snappy Operas you get a choice, and you can improve the work over time.” Student

- Working with professionals motivated the children and made them feel special.

“Working with professionals is like a dream come true. You don’t know what will happen next but you can’t wait.” Student

- As with other arts projects, the workshops allowed other perhaps non academic children to shine.

“It is always interesting because people who find the academic environment challenging have shown talents that are not visible elsewhere. Snappy Operas celebrates talents that are not celebrated elsewhere.” Teacher

- The MOG team was very hands on, which meant teachers felt well informed and supported.

“It felt like a team effort. When arts projects go wrong is where projects are being done to you, not with you. Snappy Operas felt very collaborative.” Teacher

Teachers’ experiences were highly positive:

- 86% of teachers said that Snappy Operas supported their teaching of the curriculum.
- All teachers said that Snappy Operas increased students musical and drama skills.
- All teachers said that Snappy Operas strengthened students’ team working skills.
- All teachers would recommend Mahogany Opera Group projects to other teachers.

“One of the best educational experiences I have ever had the pleasure to be involved in. The results and the impact it had on the children's confidence, self esteem were moving to see.” Teacher

- Some teachers and some creative leaders thought the time frame was too short.

“It was a lot of additional organisation on top of full time teaching roles (planning rehearsals, costumes, risk assessment, chasing permission forms) and it is hard to find the time to fit the extra time every week.” Teacher

“I think the project needs more time. The children had so much more potential than we were able to tap, and it was a constant struggle to balance the need to keep on top of our short rehearsal timescale with our desire to work in a more creative way with the children.”
Creative leader

- Some schools had logistical challenges on the performance day.

“On the performance day there were several issues with buses and allocation of dressing rooms.”

Mahogany Opera learnt lessons from the first year’s evaluation and strengthened its engagement of teachers. 63% of creative leaders said the teachers made a positive contribution in year 2 compared to 45% in year 1.

“This has been the best project that I have ever taken part.” Teacher

“Utterly inspiring and amazing. The most well organised and professional rehearsal I have been involved in over 25 years! It was amazing to have four experts for each rehearsal. The pianist being there for each rehearsal, made such a difference to the entire rehearsal.”
Teacher

The environment for the arts in the school is increasingly challenging, which places pressure on the team.

“On this project, I think what I really noticed is how the culture of music is being eradicated in schools.” Creative leader

Artists and creative leaders gained insights from the collaborative process.

“More than ever I saw that it is crucial to develop a new piece with performers. I also learned a lot about what exact features of a score and text comes over from children performing on stage.” Artist

RECOMMENDATIONS

Subject to capacity, MOG should:

- Strengthen the legacy and identify follow on activity, working with the local partners as appropriate. This might include increasing the training element of the CPD.
- Continue to strengthen its engagement with schools. This could include clarifying what skills teachers are expected to gain from the project, and what activities they should be able to carry out in the future.
- Review the timing to deliver the projects to reduce the pressure on the schools and ensure creative leaders had scores earlier.
- Review the budget, in particular including per diems for the local team.
- Strengthen the logistics for the performance days, in particular clarifying the technical requirements and roles and responsibilities of local partners.
- Consider the scope for artists to be involved in the design kits.

The weaknesses of the project were:

- The school environment was somewhat less positive for the second year, which placed additional pressure on the team.
- More could be done to turn the potential legacy into an actual legacy, for example, linking to programmes of opera visits or participation.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Snappy Operas is a nationwide project run by Mahogany Opera Group making opera with young people aged 7-11. Over a period of two years, ten regional partners had a target of helping 1,500 primary school children create and perform ten, 10-minute operas. Between autumn 2016 and spring 2018, the project worked with 1,500 primary school children across ten regions of the UK (Cornwall; Cumbria; Essex; Hull, Bridlington and Scarborough; Leicestershire; London; Norfolk; Slough; Suffolk and North Tyneside).

Each Snappy Opera is a 10-minute piece for children's voices with flexible vocal parts and accompaniment developed with the benefit of intensive R&D workshops. The process is led by creative teams composed of leading practitioners who help the young people to understand the different crafts involved in making an opera. As well as supporting student learning, Mahogany Opera Group offers professional development and training for school teachers, music and drama practitioners from each region with the aim of sharing skills and knowledge and helping increase confidence in teaching about or with opera.

FIGURE 1: TARGETS AND OUTPUTS ACROSS THE TWO YEARS (10 REGIONS)

	Number of schools	Number of participants/ audience per session	Length of session	Number of sessions	Total attendees Target	Total attendees Actual
R&D sessions	10	30	Full day	20: 2 per school	150	137
Rehearsal sessions	50	30	2 hours	250: 3 plus 2 by the teacher per school	1500	1,409
CPD	50	10	2 hours	10: 1 per region	25	44
Performances	50	200		20: 2 per region (1 school and 1 public)	2,000	3,629

THE BRIEF

The evaluation brief was to help capture learning from the first year so that the model of Snappy Operas could be tested and refined; to provide a narrative across the two years; and also to build evaluative capacity in Mahogany Opera Group and strengthen its systems to improve project delivery and understanding of the impact of the work on audiences, participants, communities and the sector for funders and other stakeholders.

CONCEPTUALISATION

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation is composed of four interlinked strands:

- **Thinking.** Framing, focusing, conceptualising, interpreting, synthesising.
- **People.** Motivating, training, involving, reassuring, listening, informing, influencing
- **Systems.** Planning, gathering data, entering data on a computer, analysing data, disseminating information.
- **Action.** Making recommendations, implementing recommendation.

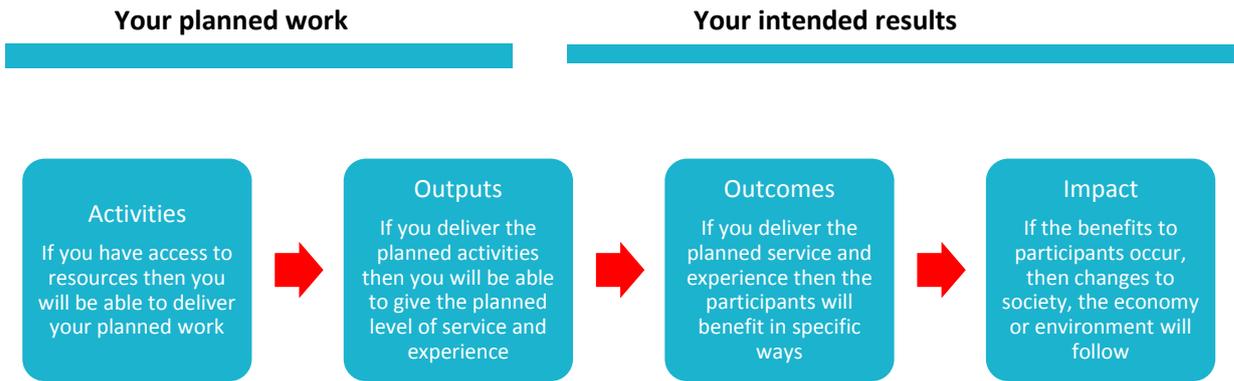
It is common for arts organisations and others to equate evaluation with Systems (methods) and not plan for the other crucial elements of the system.

Evaluative thinking has these benefits:

- **Ensuring a clear direction.** The process of creating a logic model helps to generate a group consensus about the precise intended outcomes.
- **Creating a lean evaluation system.** Being precise about intended outcomes and critical success factors helps evaluation to focus on key questions.
- **Bringing the different elements of the evaluation system together.** Articulating the theory of change helps test the implied connection between actions and expected outcomes, and results in a balanced evaluation system which covers both.
- **Testing the logic behind the project.** The logic model session helps check that the ideas behind the project are sound and it can identify potential hurdles in its delivery. Clear thinking strengthens not just the evaluation but also the implementation of a programme.
- **Ensuring expectations are realistic.** The logic model shows the chain of logic and therefore graphically illustrates the time lag between short terms outcomes, long term outcomes and impact.
- **Customising the evaluation.** The logic model helps ensure that the evaluation captures what is special about the organisation.
- **Summarising the project.** The logic model gives a concise description of the project in a form that shows its rationale.
- **Providing a structure to capture organisational learning.** Comparing what happens with what was expected or planned leads naturally to questions about organisational lessons.

EXPLANATION OF LOGIC MODELS

A logic model is a visual depiction of a programme or project. Logic models were originally developed and popularised by The Kellogg Foundation in the United States. By plotting the different stages in a programme – the actions and assumed consequences (outcomes) - logic models provide a simple but powerful way of interrogating the causality assumed by a programme. Logic models are read from left to right:



LANGUAGE

This is our definition of the terms used in a logic model:

- **Resources** are financial and non-financial inputs for a project.
- **Activities** are the actions taken by the project.
- **Outputs** are measures of effort to show that the project took place, and can be defined from the supply side (number of events), or the demand side (number of participants).
- **Outcomes** are changes in the attitudes, behaviour, skills, knowledge, motivation, feelings, or aspirations of participants; or the culture, structures, systems, or processes of organisations.
- **Impacts** are the direct and indirect effects for society, the economy and the environment.

LOGIC MODEL

This is the logic model discussed in the group:

ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	LONG OUTCOMES	IMPACT
Piloting R&D sessions Creative team briefing Online resources Rehearsal sessions	New commissions: mini operas Number of R&D sessions Number of performance sessions Number of schools	Young people develop their self-expression, self-discipline and creativity, confidence and motivation in arts, improve their music and performance skills and ability to work in a group, and increase their curiosity about, interest in, and	Mahogany Opera Group builds audiences for the future Repertoire is performed by schools and youth groups Learning is disseminated	Mahogany Opera Group is seen as a leader in participatory opera Schools have stronger infrastructure for music and opera activity

Performance sessions	Number of pupils	knowledge of, opera and the arts in general		
Teacher CPD	Number of pupils taking ArtsAward Learning resources e.g. composer led tutorials and performance videos	Teachers develop their skills and confidence, interest in delivering creative sessions, and increase their interest in and knowledge of opera and the arts in general Artists widen and enrich their artistic development Schools increase their interest in and commitment to opera and the arts in general Regional partners increase their awareness of the demand and need for opera projects and their value Mahogany Opera Group strengthens its local networks, builds its pool of creative leaders, learns about how to mobilise schools and partnerships and creates a flexible model of arts education		
Assumptions:				

Young people will be more inspired by and interested in opera if they meet opera professionals.

Young people will have a greater appreciation of opera, if they see the different roles and elements of performance.

Young people will feel more ownership of the opera if they have taken part in and witnessed the creative process.

Many people don't know that composers are writing operas today.

Barriers to opera attendance are often perceptual and embodied in myths that need debunking: families and teachers have negative preconceptions about opera.

Schools have sufficient capacity to deliver rehearsals and follow activity.

Participatory work helps build audiences for shows.

THE MODEL

The Snappy Operas model has these special features:

- **Collaborative.** Music hubs and other regional partners help select the schools and manage the relationship.
- **Contemporary.** The commission asks for an original work that is ten minutes long, without solos, with parts for three groups, scored for piano and up to two instruments. The commissions are intended to be scaleable for different group sizes, and assume low levels of existing musical training in the performers.
- **Co-created.** The artists observe and interact with the young people. Young people gain by seeing and being part of the creative process. Artists gain by seeing reactions from young people. Everyone gains from a higher quality product judged in terms of relevance.
- **Attention.** The groups are sometimes working with four professionals in the room – an exceptionally high student to teacher ratio.
- **Experiential.** Young people learn by doing. Creative leaders act as role models for creative teams: where different views are discussed robustly and respectfully, where individuality is celebrated, where the process embodies self-discipline, focus and concentration. The creative leader uses the language of the rehearsal room e.g. referring to the stage, cast.
- **Accessible.** The creative leader ensures that all young people in the class can take part. Everyone is equal.
- **Reciprocal.** The process is two way. Teachers gain CPD and also take over part of the work at the rehearsal stage.

CASE STUDY: PRIORY SCHOOL, SLOUGH

TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

The strengths of Snappy Operas are:

- The skills of the facilitators. "It is brilliant that they send in professionals because they are so experienced and can bring the best out of the children."
- The support to teachers' practice. "I have learnt a lot. I don't have much experience of opera. I have seen some. Knowing that the conductor is on the side. So the performers can address the audience. I can use that."
- The style of incorporating ideas. "The Stage Director got the children's ideas and formulated them into something that would work on the stage. She had her own ideas but got the children to work with that."
- The progressive style. "I think it is good to come back in a few times as it gives time for things to sink in."
- The online resources. "I used the audio track four times. It is useful because I usually play the piano but the piano part is really difficult so to have it as it should be frees me to check the students are doing what they need to do. I printed the script for the children."
- The CDP. "We talked to each of the leaders. It was nice to get to know them. We had plenty of notice if we needed to change things."
- Communication. "I had contact with the Stage Manager so I could ask questions directly."
- The impact on the children. "One child is quite shy but he has got more confident. Being able to concentrate on the work and see improvement rather than move onto something else has been good for him."
- Impact on other children. "A year 4 class came to watch a run through and were really concentrating."

The things the teacher would like to change are:

- To have another workshop. "More time would be helpful as there was quite a lot of singing to learn. It isn't quite automatic yet."
- To have the timing earlier. "This timing is too near to SATs."
- To have a performance for the whole school.

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

I interviewed ten children.

There were many aspects of the project the children enjoyed:

- The warm ups. "It still seemed as if we were doing something even though it wasn't towards something." "Warming up we got to make rude noises. It is the only time we can do that in school." "We get to use our voice more."

- The music. “It was mysterious.” “The music was jolly and exciting.”
- Being part of a group. “I really liked the way that everyone joined in and everyone could do something with the other person. We were all in groups and no one was left out. There were no main roles. Everyone was a main role.” “When you are with a group you can sing together, you can sing as loudly or as quietly as you like, it makes you more confident. If you get the words wrong it doesn’t matter. You have the rest of your group with you.”
- Making the costumes. “I enjoyed making the costumes: it has been creative and fun and they look cool.”
- The self-expression. “We were told what we were doing but we could put our own twist on it. So it was our own ideas as well.”
- Changing their views of opera. ““I enjoyed learning about opera: it is not just a song, there is a meaning attached to it.”
- The humour. “We get to scream and to be very funny.”
- A special experience. “I enjoyed the overall experience. I might never get the chance to do it again.”
- Missing lessons.
- The informal style. “The whole thing is friendly.”
- The small group. “A music class is a big group. Snappy Operas have a smaller group, so you can talk to the other children and get to understand them.” You might find there are people who you initially didn’t like, but you have to get on with them, and they have become friends.” “I thought it was something lots of people were doing and I found out it was only five, which made me feel we were special.”
- The non-judgemental style. “No one shouts at us if we get it wrong.” “The people were really nice. If we doing something wrong they wouldn’t shout, they would just show us what we should do.”
- Persisting on one task. “We get to improve the opera over time.” “My favourite thing is that it is not as long as a normal opera so it is easier to learn and good for children.”
- The mood enhancement. “When I am really sad, when I start to sing I get really joyful.”
- The increased confidence. “You are not very shy when you do it. You can sing loudly because it will sound better.”

The children tended not to mention things they didn’t enjoy, but could make suggestions of how they would change Snappy Operas:

- More time to learn the parts. “It would be cool if there was more going over the acting because the person who did the acting was very good when she did the facial expressions, but sometimes you couldn’t remember.”
- Less time between sessions. “I want to just do it all, rather than wait between the sessions. Because I would forget things.”
- More instruments. “Have some more instruments and let some of the children play some of the musical instruments. To get the story flowing more.”
- Have some solos.

- A stronger ending. “The content is a bit open. It has no ending. There is nothing to resolve it and then it just finishes. It could have a happy theme.” (But see other view below saying an open ending is more realistic).
- Finish the script before the children learn it. “The script wasn’t complete. You learn it and then it changes.” (But see other views on the value of being able to influence the work).

Some of the children said they felt as if their ideas mattered and some – generally the younger ones - didn’t:

- The children had a lot of input on costumes. “When we were doing costumes they gave us ideas, and it didn’t matter what was on the inspiration sheet as long as it was made out of newspaper we could do whatever we wanted.” I decided to do a paper headband rather than a paper hat mentioned on the inspiration sheet.” “Everyone didn’t have to wear trousers: some of the girls wanted to be in a suit; some of the boys wanted to be in shorts.” “We created ideas for the costumes, which made the original plans better.” “When we were doing the hats loads of people did different designs of the hats, one was pointy, mine was top hat, and one was flat.”
- The children affected the dancing. “We can make our own moves, like the machines.”
- The adults gave advice on what would work. “We were planning on making the tutus very long, but we talked to our teacher and we decided to make them shorter so people didn’t trip.”
- Many ingredients were fixed. “The whole package was there.”

Children were asked about their impressions of opera before Snappy Operas. Answers were:

- The language. “I thought the whole thing was in Latin.”
- The voices. “I thought all the voices were really high, but they can be really anything you want them to be.” “I thought the voices would be loud and the sounds would be longer.”
- Singers. “I thought it would be one singer.”
- The elements. “I thought opera was a lady singing on a stage. But when we saw Snappy Operas came to us it gave me an idea that opera can be many things.” “I didn’t think dance was involved.”
- Enjoyment. “I like singing but I didn’t think opera would be fun. I thought it was boring and difficult to understand. But it was much more fun than I expected.” “I didn’t like singing because I found it embarrassing. Now I have done Snappy Operas, it has made me feel much more confident, and I really enjoyed it.”
- No impression. “I didn’t know what operas were. I heard the name but was wondering what does that mean.”

Their impressions of opera after Snappy Operas are:

- All children would like to attend a live opera. “Snappy Operas has given me a bigger view of what opera is – not just that one thing. I didn’t realise opera was acting. Now I know more about it I would really like to go and see one.” “It hurts you eyes to look at a performance on the screen and you can see it more clearly if you can sit at the front.”

“Before we did Snappy Operas I thought opera would be quite boring and not much dance. Now we have done it, I would like to see it because I realise there is a meaning behind the songs and I can try and figure it out and it is like a game.”

- Children were looking forward to seeing the other school’s performances. “Now I want to see all the schools’ Snappy Operas because ours was so fun and cool.” “It is really good to see the different genres from Snappy Operas. I want to see what the other schools have done.”
- The children saw opera as fun. “I now think of opera as a fun, exciting experience, and chance to learn new songs and have fun singing.” “Opera is fun and exciting, with dancing and really fun stuff.”
- Opera has more elements than they thought. “It isn’t singing high pitched: there are different voices.”
- Opera has a narrative. “They tell a story through music.”
- Opera is not just for girls. “Before I thought opera was a very girly thing. I saw videos on Youtube now I think it is even, boys and girls can do it. If I had a choice I would do it.”

Children were asked how Snappy Operas differs from a usual class session. Answers were:

- More fun. “I find singing enjoyable because it is your voice, so you can sing what you want to sing, even though people guide you.” “It is exciting to be taken out of the normal lesson to meet new people.”
- More interactive. “We talked to the instructors about what we were doing, without putting our hands up, we could just say excuse me. We would get our answer immediately.” “In Snappy Operas we can express our opinions. You can talk but not too loud. One girl was talking during the practice. No one shouted at her because it isn’t about shouting, it is about communicating well.”
- More flexible. “In a class session say for English you are given a piece of work you have to do. You have to do that thing or you will be told off.” “It is nice to express yourself while you are singing. In class you have to do what your teacher says. You have to stick to the theme. In opera, you can express yourself more by the dance moves, singing and costumes.”

“When I was doing Snappy Operas I was set free.”

- More informal. “You are learning but the learning is more relaxed and flexible. If you can, go home and practice the songs.” “Because they let us speak to one another about the singing.”

“I love English and I would choose opera over English. It is interesting because you get to move around, there are no tests, and you aren’t just listening to the teacher. I like the way they teach it so you learn without even knowing in. In English you know you are learning and not having so much fun.”

- More active. “In class you are usually writing. In Snappy Operas you are usually singing. You can let yourself go free.” “You are more free to do more things that you would like than if you would in a class. You can walk around. You get to stand on stage and do fun warm ups.”

- More developmental. “You don’t get a choice in class: you have to stick to one piece of work and then you have to finish it. In Snappy Operas you get a choice, and you can improve the work over time.”
- More special. “You feel important because you have been selected to be in the group.”
- More real. “Snappy Operas made me think a lot more about the future because our opera is about machines. The end is a cliff-hanger, which the audience has to answer and this makes us think about what we should do because these things could happen. Loads of things with happy endings aren’t so real.”

CASE STUDY: TOWER HAMLETS TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

I interviewed students from two schools and a teacher from a third.

The strengths of Snappy Operas are:

- The level. "It gives the children a chance to perform opera in an accessible way. But it isn't talking down to them. It uses the language of opera."
- The performance. "Working towards a performance is really focusing."
- Age appropriate. "I thought The Machine Dream was very well written for children, memorable and singable so it was easy to teach."
- The number of facilitators. "It is great for the kids to have two professionals. That level of attention and professionalism. I was amazed by the skill of the pianist."
- The timing. "The timing is perfect. Next half term would have been more challenging because of SATS."
- Communication. "I like the regular email contact."

"It felt like a team effort. When arts projects go wrong is where projects are being done to you, not with you. Snappy Operas felt very collaborative."

- Allowing new children to shine. "It is always interesting because people who find the academic environment challenging have shown talents that are not visible elsewhere. Snappy Operas celebrates talents that are not celebrated elsewhere."
- The team feeling. "The class feel it is a team effort. There are kids who were reticent to sing, who are really making an effort. One kids wasn't positive about the experience at the beginning."
- The age group. "Kids become more self conscious at this age and singing is seen as girly."

Possible improvements:

- Making the workshops shorter. "Two and a half hours is demanding of students' concentration."
- Having a longer period for the project. "I understand why it is time limited to a half term, but there is a lot to do in a short time. I wonder if it could be extended."

The challenges of the project were:

- Some children were refusing to sing because they have been told it is haram. And some parents didn't want their children to perform in a church. However the head teacher was very supportive and only a couple of children didn't take part on religious grounds.
- The school chose a whole class – rather than for other arts projects, where individuals are chosen because of specific interests – which meant some children weren't sure why they were there at first.

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

I interviewed 14 children.

There were many aspects of the project the children enjoyed:

- The feeling of camaraderie. "I enjoyed performing with children in my class. We were all doing it together. Everyone is very nice at Snappy Operas; they are never shouting."
- Learning bit by bit. "They gave us a lot of support. They helped us memorise the words. It isn't nice if you just go straight to it."
- Wearing the costumes. "When you wear the costume you feel as if you are a real person from the olden times." "The costumes show who you are and helps with the acting. You don't have to pretend, you are that character."
- The message. "The opera ensures the audience cares about the war. And the audience was listening."
- The non-judgemental style. "The facilitators make you feel very comfortable. At home. They don't threaten you. It is like a warm welcome."
- The intensity. "I enjoyed that it was a lot of fun. There was a lot to do. In class, if I am just sitting down all day, I find myself day dreaming." "You can't just sit down and day dream, there is always something to do, a lot to remember, which keeps you focused you are working hard but not stressed. You see people smiling and it makes you happy." "It isn't easy to sing and act, which means you have to concentrate hard. If you are not talking you have to listen and look at the others."
- The performance. "It sounds very nice all together. It opens up a different world."
- Playing. "I enjoyed the acting. It is fun. When the Roman army attacks it is fun to fall down on the ground. It gets you to move around a lot. We don't do this in school."
- The feeling. "It is really exciting and happy because there is a lot of dancing and acting."
- Self expression. "It made you express your opinions. At first I wasn't confident and Snappy Operas built up my confidence, by being able to express my feelings." "I enjoyed that you can be yourself. In opera you can express yourself freely."

Children suggested these possible changes:

- The length of the performance could be extended to give time for costume changes. "It should be a little less snappy. When people fall, you need to not step on them. Taking off your tabard takes time. Not two seconds."
- The operas should be about fairy tales, so that the children already know the story.
- The learning resources introductory videos could be shorter. "I think the videos are too long. I would like them to be a bit shorter."

Children generally felt that their ideas mattered and were able to give specific examples of where the performance changed to reflect pupils' ideas:

- Ideas are combined. "All are opinions are valued with Snappy Operas. Just because we are kids doesn't mean we can't have opinions. They take our ideas and make them

better. The kids feel they are valued not just the teachers. It is your performance. You are allowed to give opinions.” “Our ideas make it even better.”

- The speed was changed. “Sometimes when things don’t work out, they ask us what should we do. It is good to have ideas from the actors. We are part of the group. They changed the singing to make it a bit slower.”
- Children can express themselves. “Sometimes they give you lines. They say we can express our emotions. It improves the performance and feels good to express your emotions.”
- Children helped with character development. “When we were telling ideas for the song, we acted each of the animals. We could do anything.” “The animals became more fun because of our ideas.” “I also enjoyed that we got to create the ideas for the animals. We gave the animals the characters – monkey and eagle. And to put the animals in other languages. We thought about what noise the dragon flies make.” “We had to think of an animal and pretend you were that animal and you had to write about what you looked like, felt like and your habit.”

Children were asked about their impressions of opera before Snappy Operas. Answers were:

- It was only singing. “I thought it would just be singing, I didn’t think it would also be acting.” “I thought it would be two minutes of a high voice. Loads of songs to memorise. But there are only three. There is more acting.” “I thought it would be lots of ladies singing high pitched with lots of big dresses.”
- It would be difficult. “I thought Snappy Operas would be really hard, but it turned out to be really easy.” “I haven’t been to a live opera. I have heard opera, women singing, and I thought how am I going to do that?” “When I got warmed up, I found I could do that. They gave us lines and explained how our lines should be. I liked how they warmed us up, that felt better.” “At first I thought I would be nervous, when I was on the stage I thought I wouldn’t make it, then when there was an audience I knew I would do my best.”
- It was one sound. “I thought opera was just screaming.”
- The cast would be passive. “I thought the stage directors would order us around, but they were really nice.”
- It would be boring. “I thought it was a bit boring because it was just people singing high or low.”

All students would like to see a live opera now. Their impressions of opera now are:

- Telling a story. “I think that opera would be more about telling a story, not just singing. Because singing randomly doesn’t matter. If you sing and act and make a story, it is likely the audience will be more engaged.” “I would be bored if there was no acting. If there is an opera with acting, I would enjoy it.”
- It is fun. “It is just fun. That it can do anything. It can be on any subject at all.”

It is varied. “I like the idea of opera now. I have realised that not every opera has to be just singing, I realise that every opera can be different.” “I would like to see live opera to see how it compares to what we are doing.” “It isn’t just singing, you are acting. You can choose what you want to do. There is a wide variety of what you can do.”

“I never was interested in it, but now I am. I realise you can do anything with it.”

- Interaction with the audience. “I want to see if they respect the people on stage and are generous about them.”

Snappy Operas differed from a usual class session because of:

- Changing ideas. “In Snappy Operas sometimes they change the action, volume and the props. And you need to memorise it again. At school, when you practice it is fixed.” “The class instructions are easier.”
- Support – in both. “It is pretty similar. They support you a lot in normal lessons. Understanding the method you are using.”
- The nature of performance. “In Snappy Operas you have the stage props and music. In the classroom you wouldn’t have the props, or people watching.”
- Level of activity. “We don’t do standing up and acting and singing. We do something from a Powerpoint.” “In the workshop you stand up. When as a class we just sit and get a book and read.” “In Snappy Operas you have a lot of different things. You don’t have to do writing. With English you have to write.”
- Sustained pace. “It is not like you are going to fall asleep in Snappy Operas. Body movements keeps you awake. There is always something to do. You can never day dream. It isn’t do it wait, it is do it do it do it.”
- Professional facilitators. “We have had professionals directing us. We know that we don’t need to be worried. Nothing is going to go wrong because they are there to help us.” “I feel like working with professional people is a one time opportunity, special. People dream about it and we get the opportunity and we don’t want to spoil it. Teachers are not so special because no one knows them. With professionals, they are publicly known. They are recognisable and you want their autograph.” “They are so imaginative and fun.”
- Feeling of being special. “I love school, but Snappy Operas is like being out of school and you become like a famous actor. That helps us motivate ourselves and make it good.”
- Intensity. “A lot more effort. It is good because you can improve, you will be more confident. Very tiring.”

“With professionals, some do what they want but with Snappy Operas they do what we want to do. That is why I like Snappy Operas. They don’t seem professionals: they are just normal people who have a good life.”

- Relaxed teaching style. “They were like us as well. They weren’t teaching us. They were helping us.”
- The excitement. “Working with professionals is like a dream come true. You don’t know what will happen next but you can’t wait.”
- Skill development. “Snappy Operas can build up your confidence, whereas class builds your intelligence but not your confidence. In class if you have ideas, I was shy, I wouldn’t put my hand up much. When you are acting you can be you.”

SURVEYS OF TEACHERS

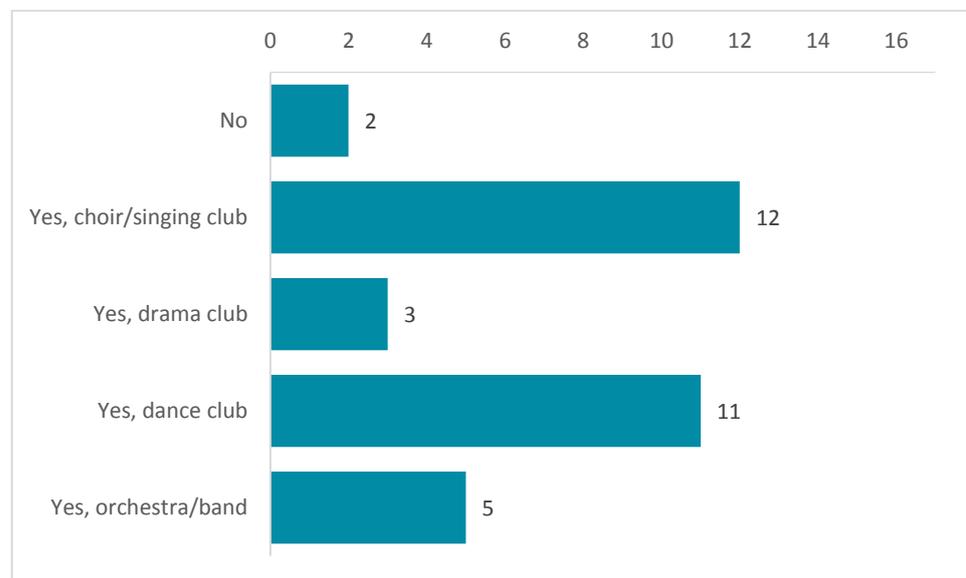
BASELINE SURVEY

We have 17 respondents from 17 schools. Respondents have been teachers for four to 38 years.

In the last term (before Snappy Operas) seven respondents said that the school took groups of students to see a performance in an arts venue (e.g. theatre, dance, music, opera) in seven schools.

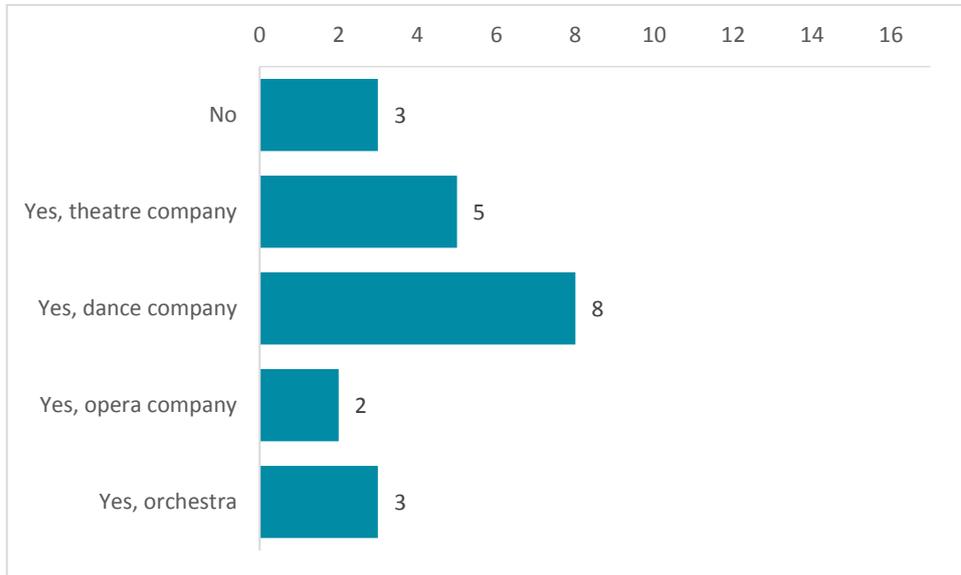
Fifteen of the schools had some extra-curricular activity for the performing arts before Snappy Operas.

FIGURE 2: IN THE LAST TERM (BEFORE SNAPPY OPERAS), DID YOUR SCHOOL HAVE ANY EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS?



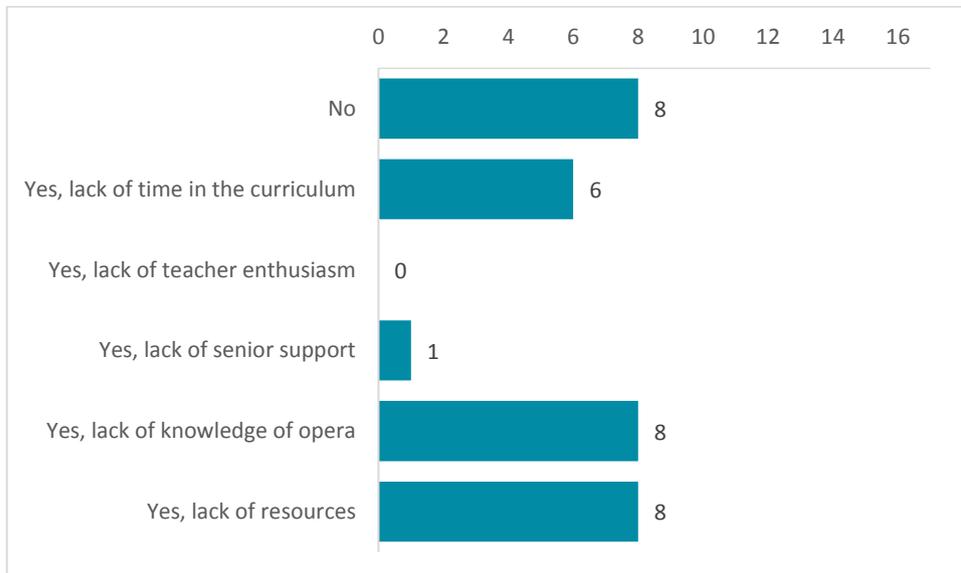
14 of the teachers had had a professional performing arts organisation run workshops for pupils but only two of these were opera-related.

FIGURE 3: HAS YOUR ORGANISATION HAD A PROFESSIONAL PERFORMING ARTS ORGANISATION COME INTO THE SCHOOL TO RUN WORKSHOPS FOR PUPILS?

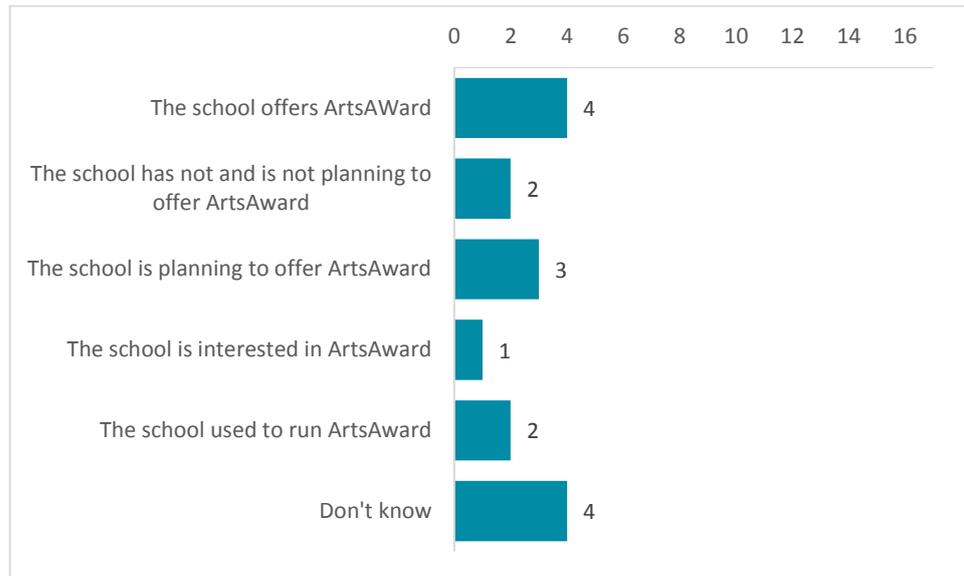


The teachers reported no lack of enthusiasm or senior level support, but rather a lack of knowledge of opera, lack of time and money.

FIGURE 4: ARE THERE BARRIERS TO RUNNING OPERA PROJECTS IN YOUR SCHOOL?



Four teachers said their schools offer ArtsAward.

FIGURE 5: WHAT IS YOUR SCHOOL'S APPROACH TO ARTSAWARD?

Teachers were also asked if they had any concerns about Snappy Operas. Fourteen said no or skipped the question. Two said that they were concerned about finding the time, especially to make costumes. One observed that visiting groups do not have the background to understand behavioural issues such as bullying.

PROJECT END QUESTIONNAIRE

INTRODUCTION

We had 24 replies. The average length of time respondents had been a teacher was 12.5 years.

R&D/AUTUMN WORKSHOPS

10 respondents had attended the Autumn workshops. All teachers thought the workshops were new, enjoyable, inspiring, clear well explained in advance and well communicated within the school. All respondents also thought their role was clear and appropriate.

FIGURE 6: VIEWS ON THE AUTUMN TERM WORKSHOPS (AGGREGATION OF 'YES DEFINITELY' AND 'YES PROBABLY' RESPONSES)

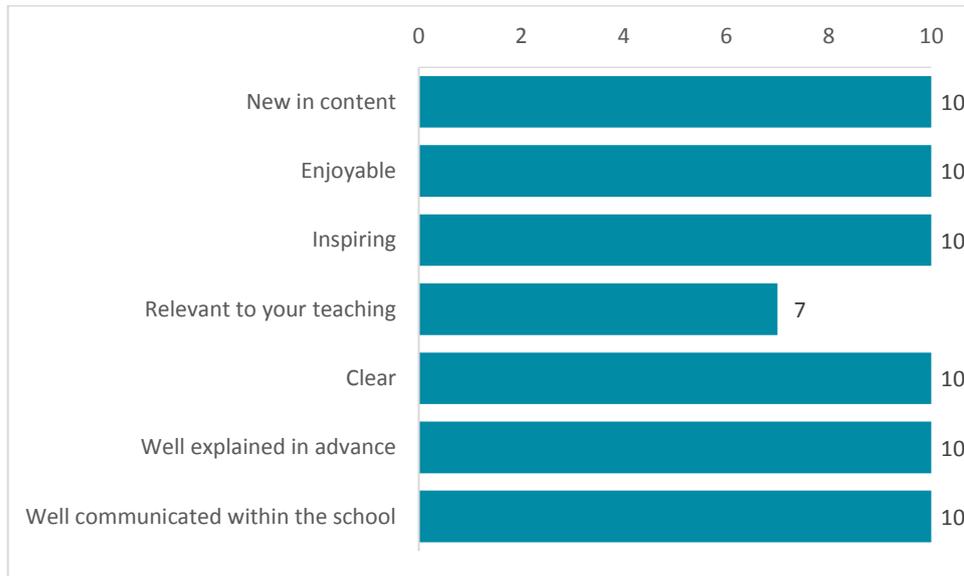
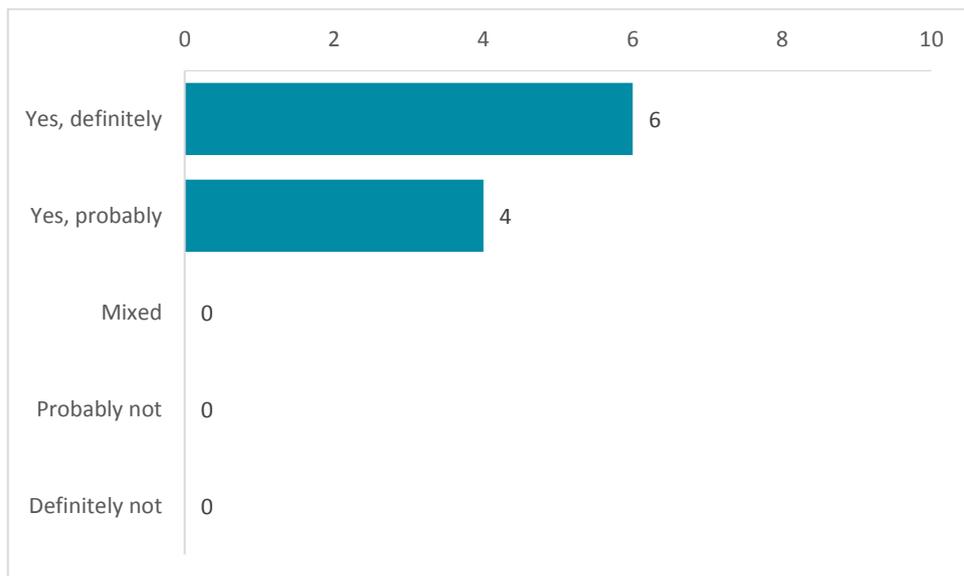


FIGURE 7: WAS YOUR ROLE IN THE AUTUMN TERM WORKSHOPS CLEAR AND APPROPRIATE?



REHEARSAL SESSIONS

22 respondents had attended Snappy Opera rehearsal sessions.

All teachers knew the name of the opera their group were working on and we have responses for each piece. All teachers said the rehearsal sessions were enjoyable, inspiring and clear. All except two said the sessions were well explained in advance and well communicated within the school.

“This has been the best project that I have ever taken part.”

“Utterly inspiring and amazing. The most well organised and professional rehearsal I have been involved in over 25 years! It was amazing to have four experts for each rehearsal. The pianist being there for each rehearsal, made such a difference to the entire rehearsal.”

FIGURE 8: WHICH OPERA DID YOUR SCHOOL WORK ON?

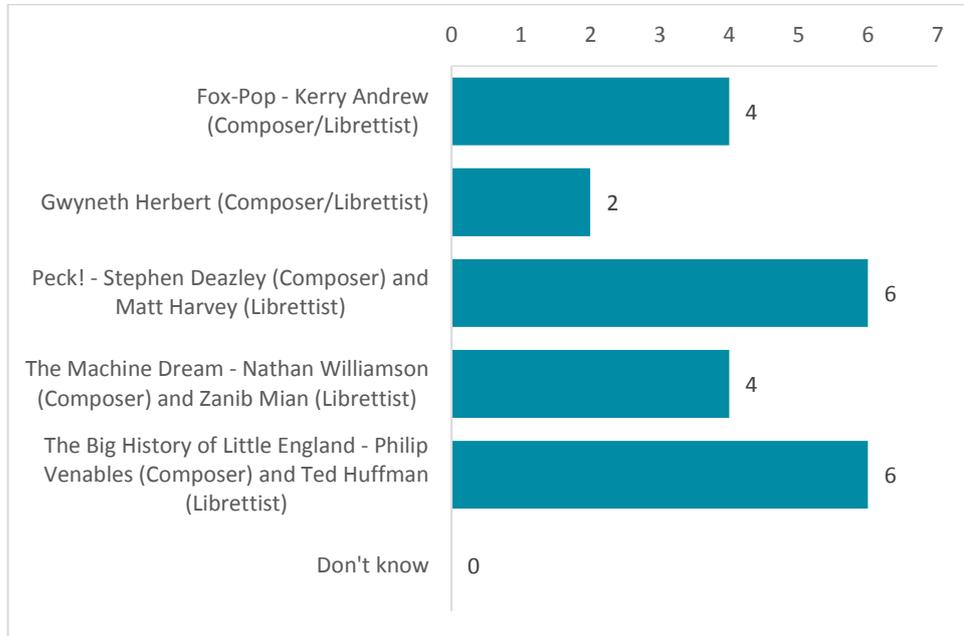
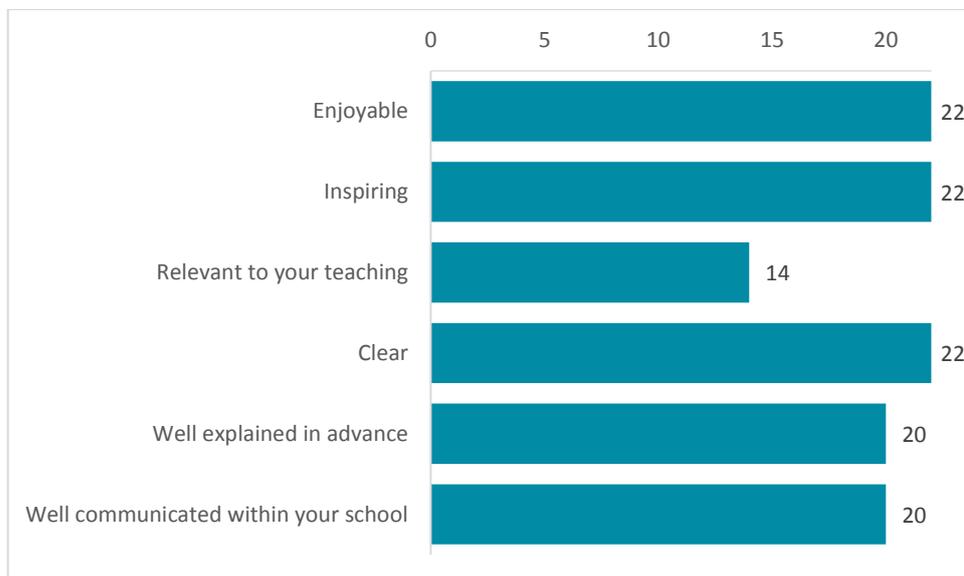


FIGURE 9: VIEWS OF THE REHEARSAL SESSIONS RUN BY MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP

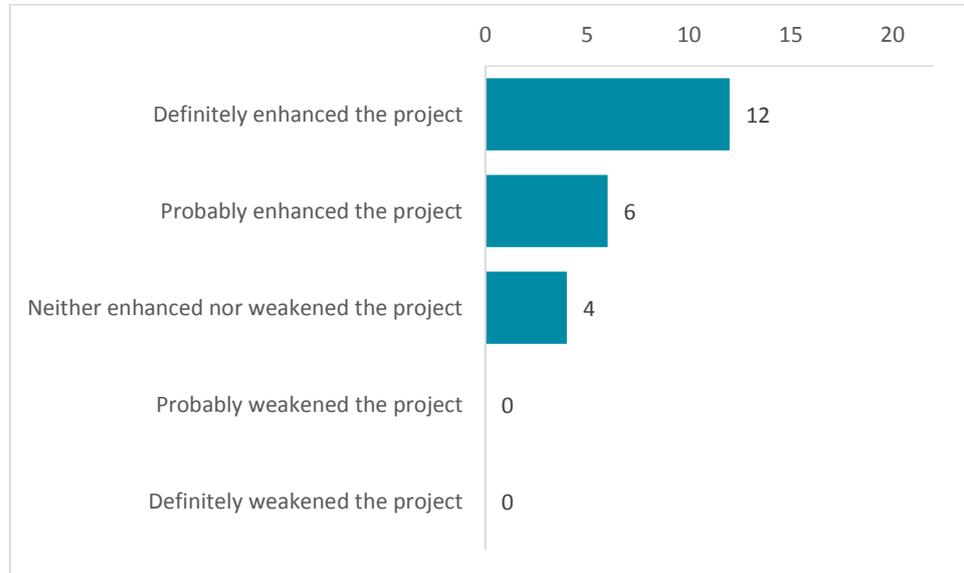


18 teachers thought the box of materials enhanced the project. Comments were that the online resources helped too but also that some of the props were poor quality.

“The materials provided were good. On the stage they props really brought the opera to life. However I found the amount of props that had to be made a challenge. Some of the props the children could make which was fine, but others they couldn't. The ruffs took hours and hours (with my mum's help - it was definitely a 2 man job!) Also they did not last - after the first dress rehearsal we had to fix them, and by the actual performance they were really on their last threads.”

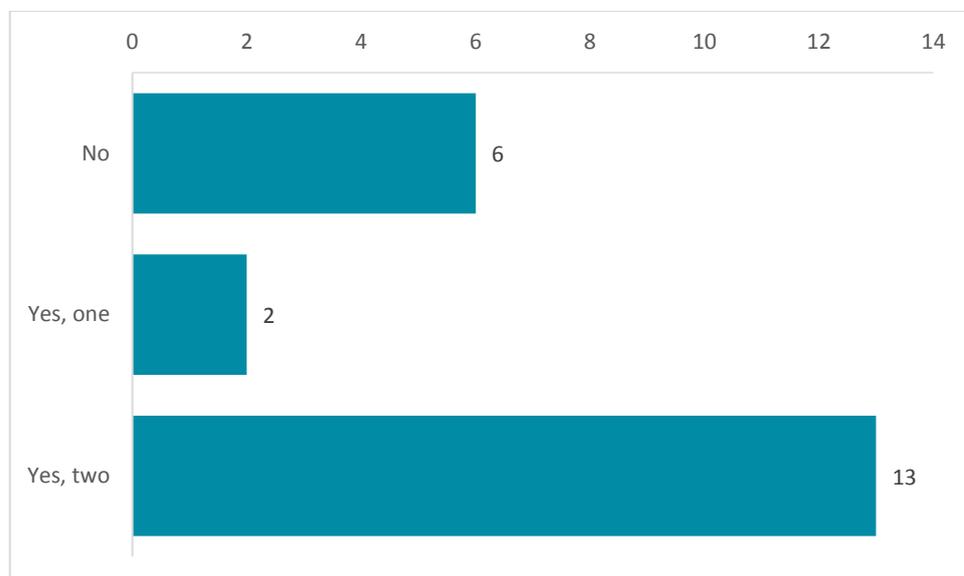
“Gave us a great starting point and we used most of it. Helped to relieve the stress and cost.”

FIGURE 10: THIS IS THE FIRST YEAR WE HAVE PROVIDED A BOX OF MATERIALS TO HELP WITH COSTUMES AND PROPS. DID THE BOX OF MATERIALS ENHANCE THE PROJECT?



Six respondents said they didn't run rehearsal sessions, which is more than for the first year (one).

FIGURE 11: DID YOUR SCHOOL RUN REHEARSAL SESSIONS FOR SNAPPY OPERAS?



CPD SESSION

20 respondents attended the Mahogany Opera Group CPD session.

16 or more (80%) said that they were sufficiently participative, new in content, inspiring, clear, and well organised. Comments were that teachers didn't want to learn about the

other operas they weren't doing, and would have appreciated the session being earlier. The lack of interest in other operas might explain the teachers who said the session was too detailed.

FIGURE 12: VIEWS OF THE CPD SESSION

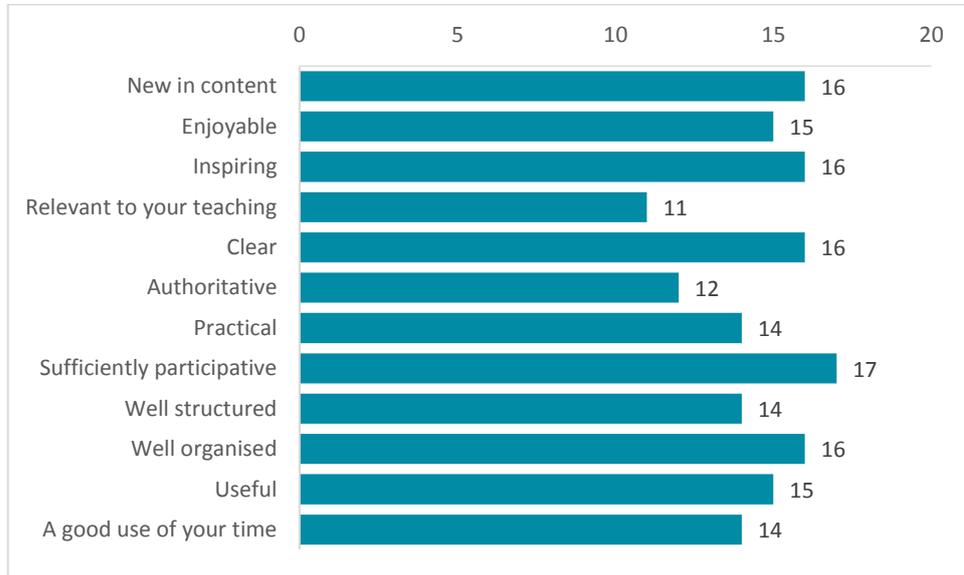
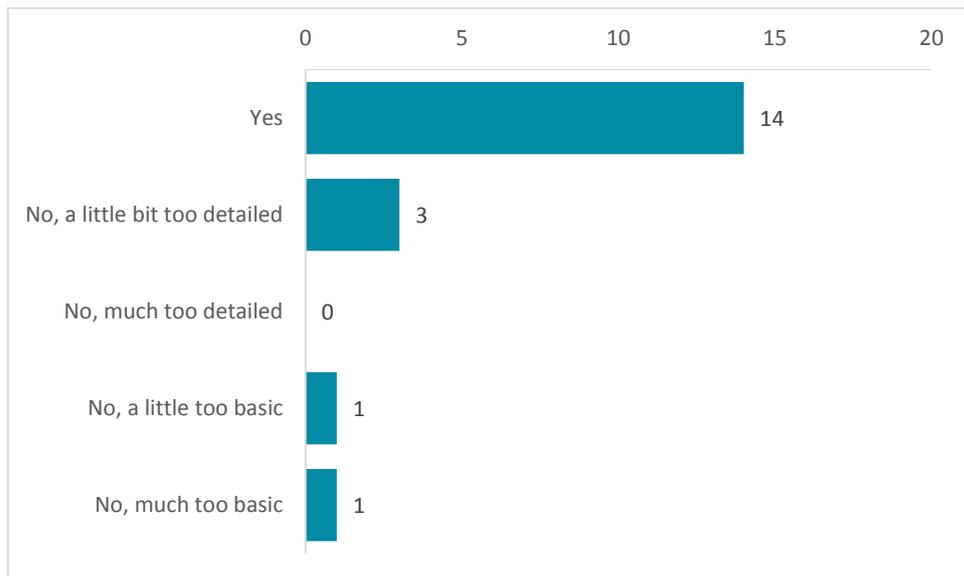


FIGURE 13: WAS THE CPD SESSION AT THE RIGHT LEVEL?



“I did not feel it was a CPD session. We talked about a few practicalities but there was no specific structure to the session. Not sure of the purpose.”

“It was good to meet the other teachers from other schools, but some of the discussions were not relevant at all as the feedback/discussion was specific to specific operas.”

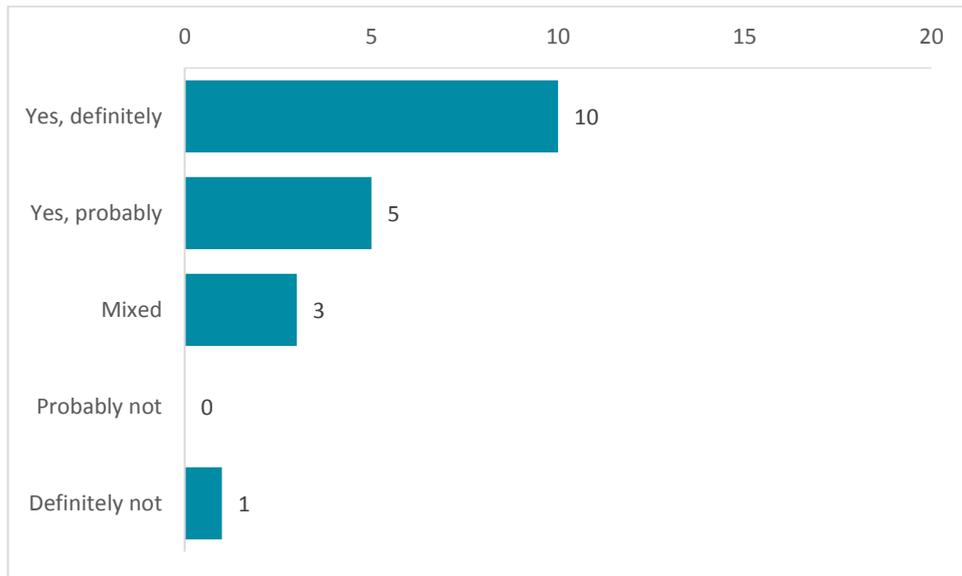
“Probably should be held earlier in the year to prepare for the opera well in advance.”

“It felt inclusive and supportive even to those of us feeling a little out of our depth.”

“Not helpful to have to learn about the other operas that we weren't doing.”

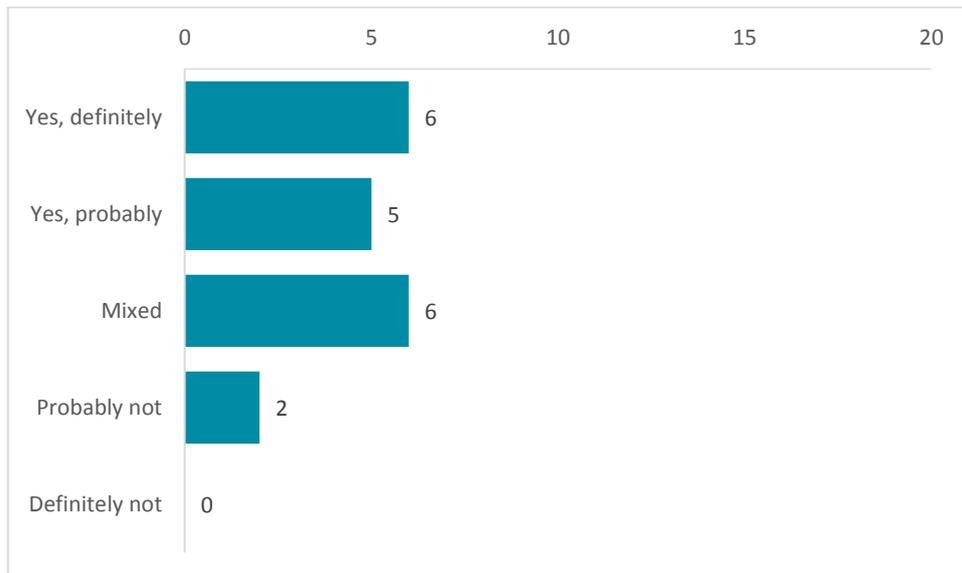
Most but not all respondents came away with a clear understanding of what they needed to do.

FIGURE 14: DID YOU COME AWAY FROM THE CPD SESSION WITH A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT YOU NEEDED TO DO IN THE SNAPPY OPERAS PROJECT?



The CPD was somewhat useful for networking.

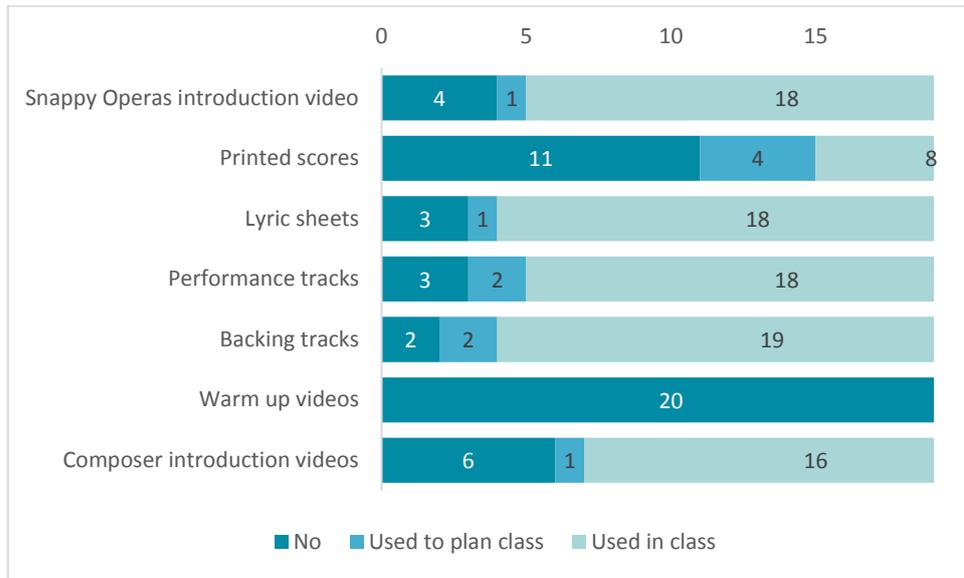
FIGURE 15: WAS THE CPD SESSION USEFUL FOR NETWORKING?



ONLINE RESOURCES

23 of the respondents looked at the Snappy Operas online resources. Most used the introductory video, lyric sheets, performance tracks, backing tracks in class and composer introduction videos, especially in class.

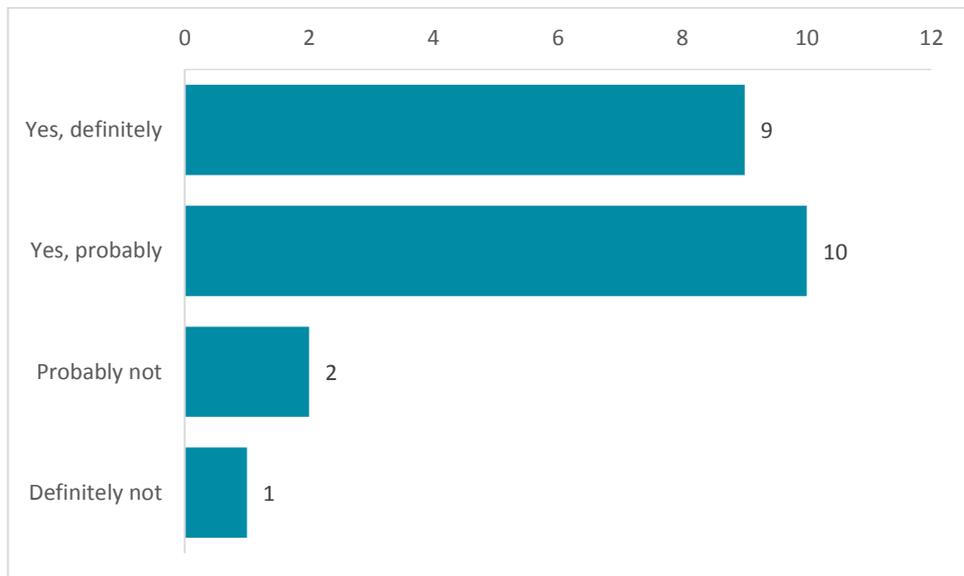
FIGURE 16: DID YOU USE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?



OUTCOMES

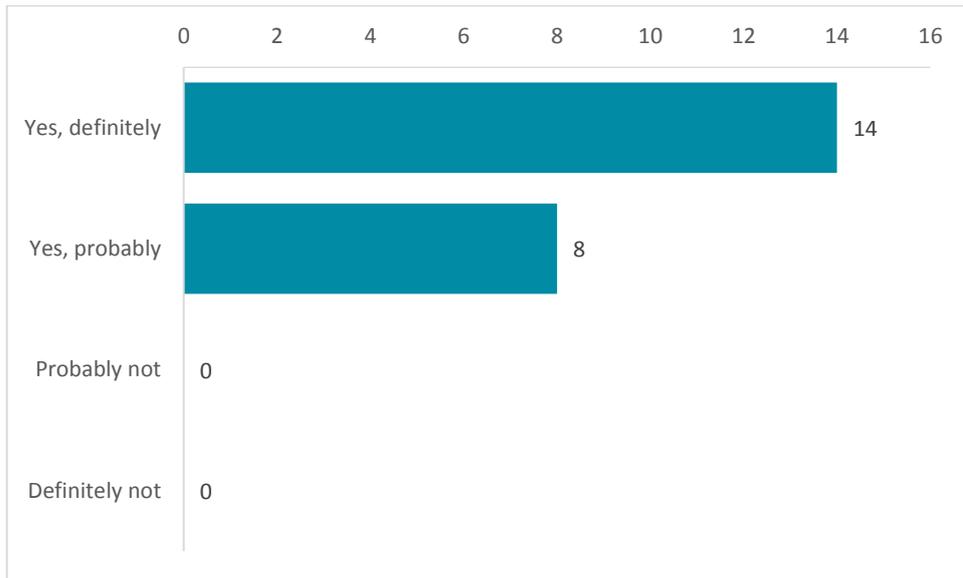
86% of teachers said that Snappy Operas supported their teaching of the curriculum.

FIGURE 17: DID SNAPPY OPERAS SUPPORT YOUR TEACHING OF THE CURRICULUM?



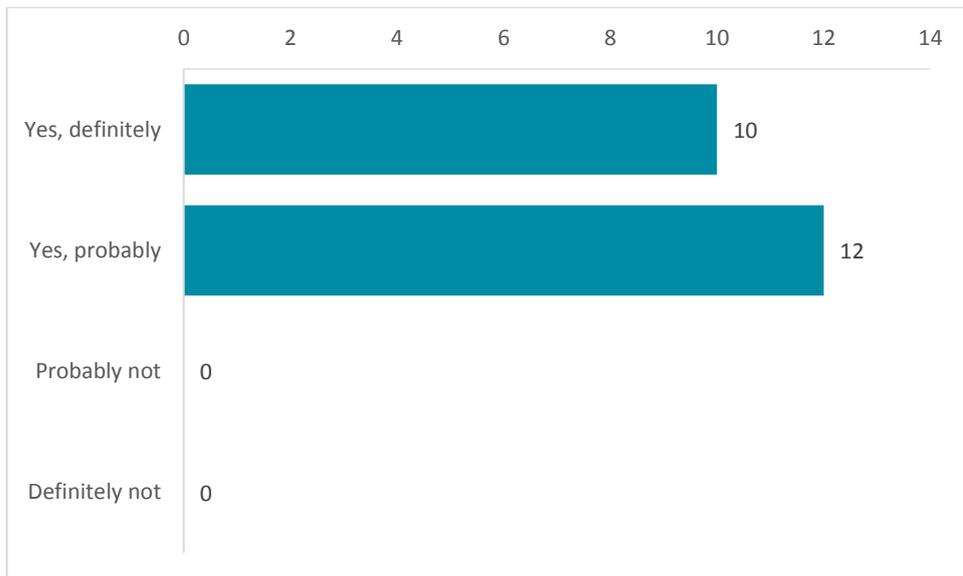
All teachers said that Snappy Operas increased students musical and drama skills.

FIGURE 18: IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT SNAPPY OPERAS HAS INCREASED STUDENTS' MUSICAL AND DRAMA SKILLS?



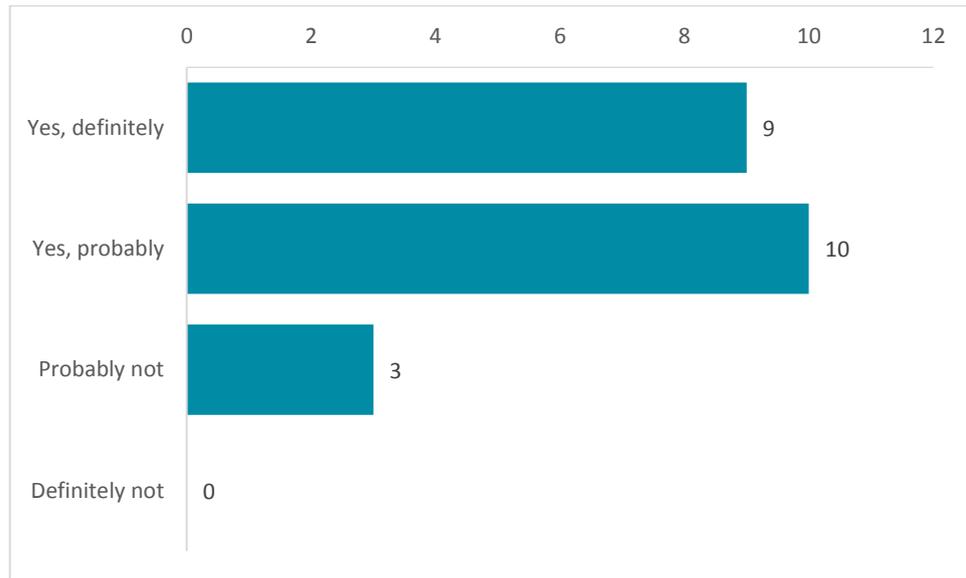
All teachers said that Snappy Operas strengthened students' team working skills.

FIGURE 19: IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT SNAPPY OPERAS HAS STRENGTHENED STUDENTS' TEAM WORKING SKILLS?



83% of teachers said that Snappy Operas strengthened students' self-discipline.

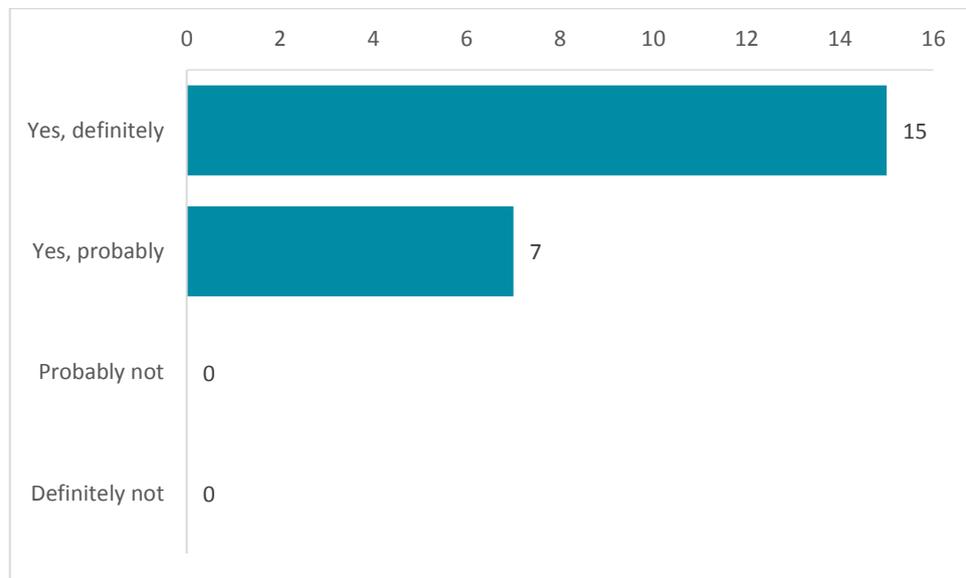
FIGURE 20: IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT SNAPPY OPERAS HAS STRENGTHENED STUDENTS' SELF-DISCIPLINE?



“My class have learnt the importance of listening and following instructions closely.”

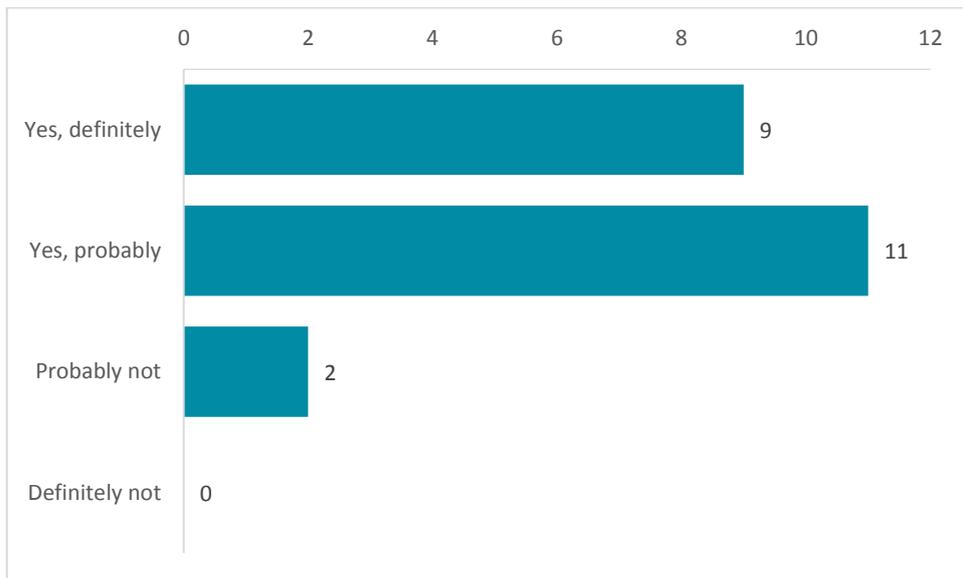
All teachers said that Snappy Operas increased student’s interest in opera.

FIGURE 21: IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT SNAPPY OPERAS HAS INCREASED STUDENTS' INTEREST IN OPERA?



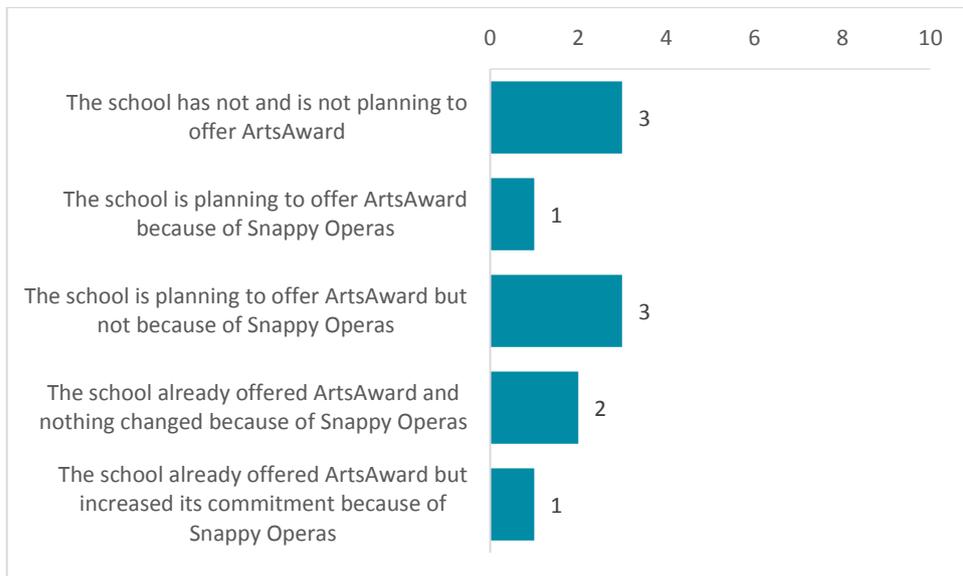
90% of teachers thought the students had enough ownership of the creative process.

FIGURE 22: OVERALL, DID YOU THINK THE STUDENTS HAD ENOUGH OWNERSHIP OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS?

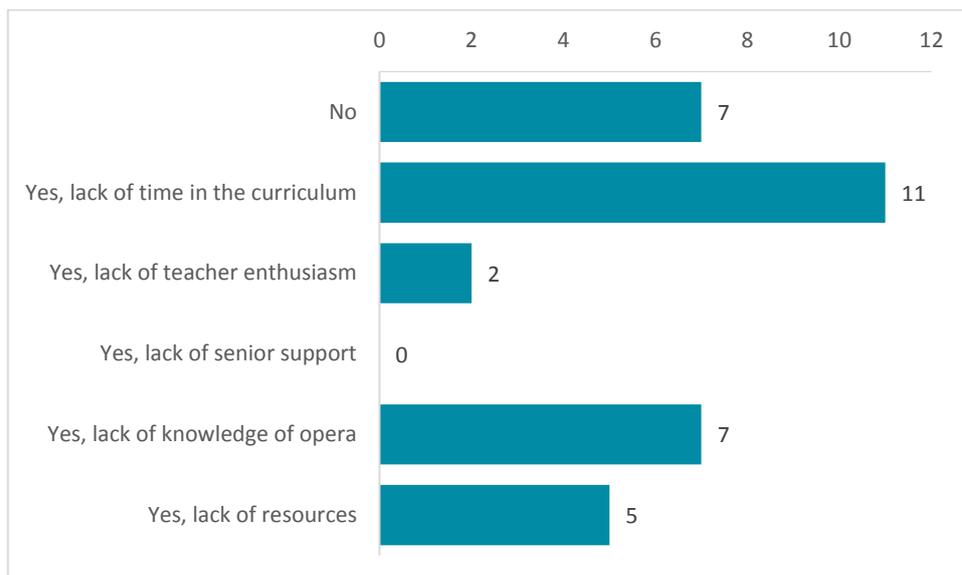


Two schools have either decided to offer, or increased their commitment to ArtsAward as a result of Snappy Operas. Two didn't know the schools view of ArtsAward.

FIGURE 23: WHAT IS YOUR SCHOOL'S APPROACH TO ARTSAWARD?



The main barrier to running opera projects in school is lack of time in the curriculum.

FIGURE 24: ARE THERE BARRIERS TO RUNNING OPERA PROJECTS IN YOUR SCHOOL?

OVERALL VIEWS

Teachers were asked what they thought were the strengths of Snappy Operas. Responses had these themes:

- Quality of the commission. "I thought the piece was of a high quality and worked very well for young voices." "Peck was brilliantly composed and written."
- Supportive process. "I felt very supported by the creative team and whenever there were problems everyone was very solutions focused." "The professional team were amazing to work with." "Fantastic support at the beginning and throughout the project."
- Team feeling. "Positivity and enthusiasm." "Great enthusiasm and teaching of music by members of Snappy Opera. This lead to students engaging with the opera and enjoying the rehearsal sessions. Good balance of music and drama." "Inspiring and professional at all times."

"The sessions led by the team were fantastic. They were super engaging and they seemed to run seamlessly. The children always looked forward to the sessions."

- Information on opera. "It was a great introduction to opera, working with composer and librettist, and should provide the children with an invaluable preparation for composing their own opera next year!" "Making opera approachable and fun."
- Effect on students. "The children developed their performance skills. The venue boosted their confidence as it felt very grand. Parents were interested in seeing the performance." "The chance to perform for an audience made up of people the children didn't know in a large venue was a great opportunity for the children to improve their performance skills." "The children have become more confident and mature." "The children really enjoyed it. From talking to them, they explained it really increased their confidence in performing." "It was very good for the children. They loved it and it pushed them in a new direction."

- Ownership by the children. “The fact that the children performed the whole thing themselves, made their own props and watched other groups perform. Amazing.”

“The strength was the professionals who we worked with to put the opera together - the results they achieved were incredible.”

- Working with professionals. “Being able to meet the composer!”
- Allowing different children to shine. “We have identified talent amongst pupils.”
- Project management. “Communication via email was very easy and efficient.”

Teachers were asked what they thought were the weaknesses of Snappy Operas. Responses had these themes:

- None. “I didn't feel there were any as the resources, organisation, materials, professionals were all brilliant. The only improvement would be the choice of venue - mainly the room where we had to wait for in between rehearsals on the day, it was extremely cold and noisy with several different schools in the same room. I did not see this as a faulty of Snappy Opera though, more the venue.”

“None. It's perfect! I think it should be a compulsory part of the curriculum!”

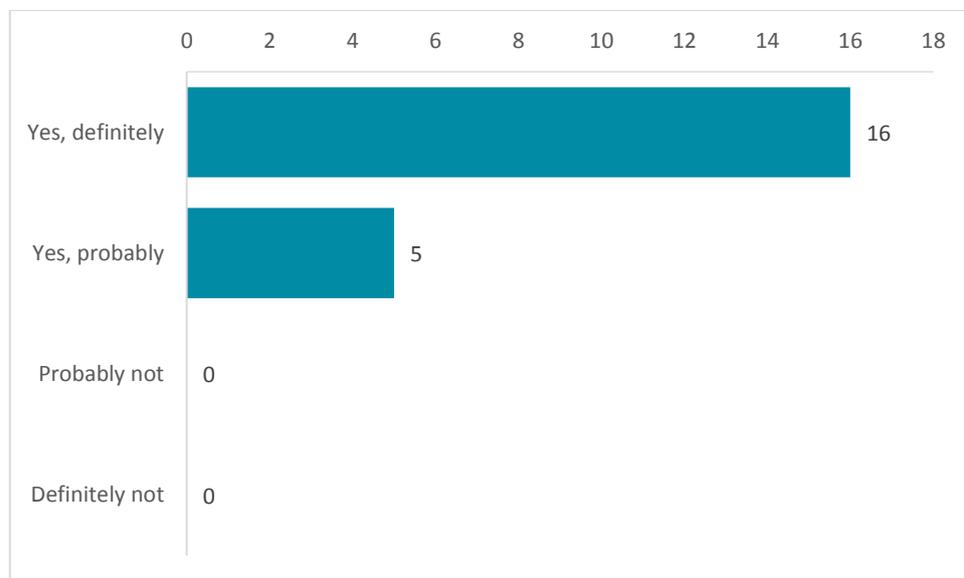
- Lack of time. “For our particular opera, we had to fit in a lot of extra work to learn about the events mentioned in our opera- it was extremely challenging in terms of time.” “Maybe the project could have run over a few more weeks to give a bit more time to learn. Although the kids were fine.” “Felt a little rushed and children were not one hundred percent clear on what they had to do (but managed to pull it off on the night).” “Time of year. Fitting in the costume creations was tricky. It would have been helpful to know from the outset exactly how many of each costume were required, and an approximation of how much time would be needed to achieve this so that it could be planned for more effectively.” “I thought it was wonderful! I loved being a part of the process. If we were to do it again next year, I would like to be involved more (and have more time) to make props.”
- Work for the teacher. “It was a lot of additional organisation on top of full time teaching roles (planning rehearsals, costumes, risk assessment, chasing permission forms) and it is hard to find the time to fit the extra time every week. It would be good if there was a music lead to do all of that.” “While the provided costume instructions and materials were good, some of them were quite ambitious and required a lot of class time to create (almost three hours). This was in addition to time teachers spent outside of class preparing costumes. If costumes were be simpler to create that would greatly reduce the time commitment the opera required and allow more time for rehearsing the music.”
- Difference between R&D and rehearsals. “I would have liked to have been part of the creation of the work.” “The children lost quite a bit of enthusiasm with the second part of the process where we began to learn a different opera. They had felt very ' invested' in the original workshops and it was difficult to get that 'spark' back.”
- Lack of clarity over teacher’s role. “I wasn’t quite clear of my own role in the sessions and I would clarify this beforehand next time.”
- Logistics for the performance. “On the performance day there were several issues with buses and allocation of dressing rooms.” “I found the organisation of the performance

day quite stressful. It took us 45 minutes to walk there, have the rehearsal, walk back to school. Then walk back up again for 3pm. The children were exhausted from this. Perhaps a having a room at the venue where we could have stayed after our rehearsal would have been better. Or have the performance on the following day during school hours.” “Transporting the props to the venue was also logistically challenging - we couldn't carry them all up with us so I had to take my car up the night before with the props in and leave it there. If I was not able to do this I'm not sure how we could have managed.”

- Timing. “Earlier in the school year would work better particularly if you want Y6s to be involved.”

All teachers would recommend Mahogany Opera Group projects to other teachers.

FIGURE 25: WOULD YOU RECOMMEND MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP PROJECTS TO OTHER TEACHERS?



“One of the best educational experiences I have ever had the pleasure to be involved in. The results and the impact it had on the children's confidence, self esteem were moving to see.”

LOCAL PARTNER SURVEY

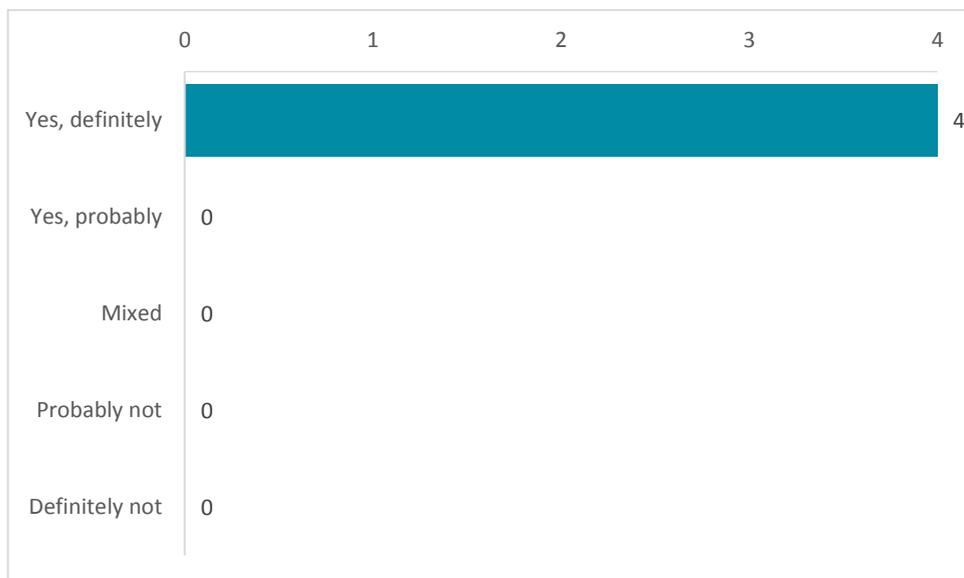
INTRODUCTION

We have four respondents, missing one region (Essex).

THE PROCESS

All respondents said they had enough information.

FIGURE 26: DID YOU HAVE ENOUGH INFORMATION FROM MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP ABOUT SNAPPY OPERAS?



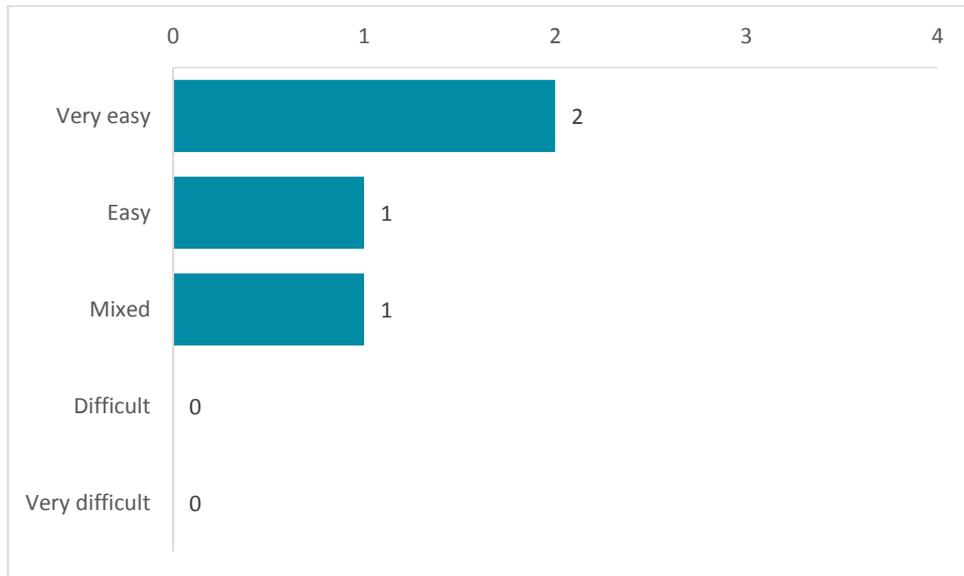
No partner said that recruitment was difficult. One said it was mixed because they deliberately targeted new schools.

“As we are a multi-academy trust, it is relatively straightforward to get schools on board.”

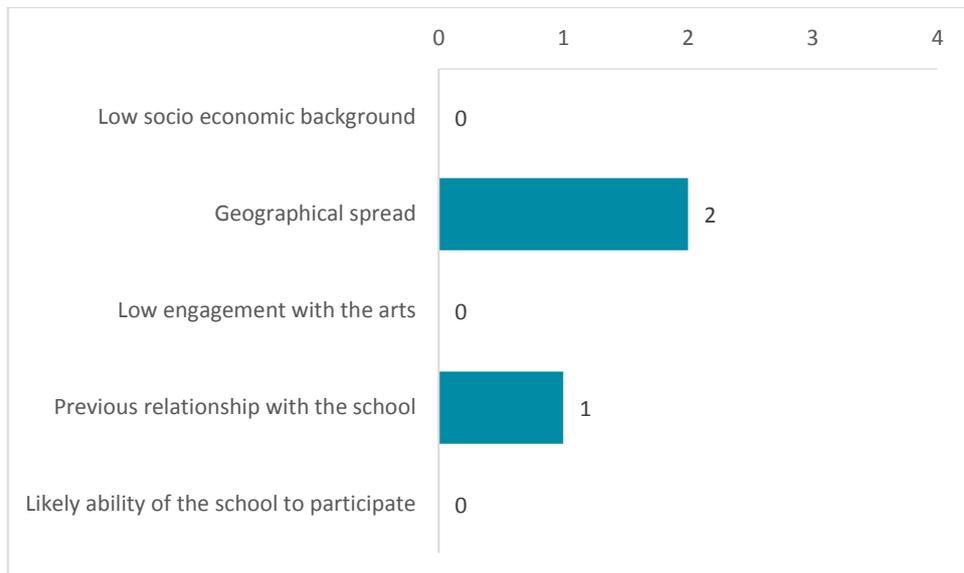
“I think this is because we deliberately targeted an area of the county that we don't usually work in - I did contact more schools than needed and some didn't respond at all whilst others thought it too big a commitment for their school.”

“It was easy to get schools on board who already engage with this style of work, however it would have been worthwhile to have had more time to promote the project to all schools enabling pupils who don't access high quality music and arts activities to do so.”

“More schools wanted to take part than we had space for on the project.”

FIGURE 27: WAS THE RECRUITMENT OF SCHOOLS TO SNAPPY OPERAS EASY OR DIFFICULT?

Partners used criteria around engagement with the arts, as well as seeking a geographical spread. In their comments, one said they that all their schools had a low socio economic background.

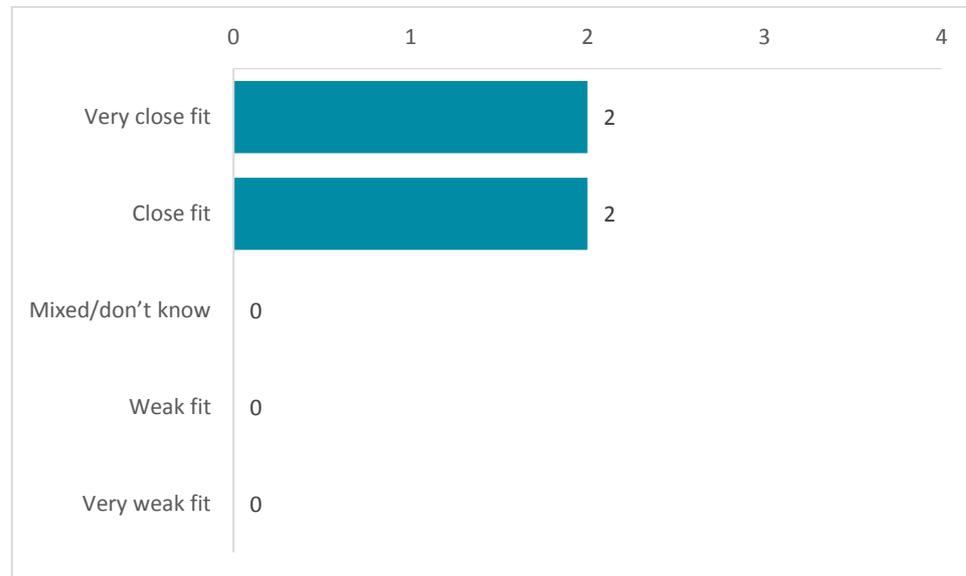
FIGURE 28: WHAT CRITERIA DID YOU USE TO RECRUIT SCHOOLS FOR SNAPPY OPERAS?

“Projects are offered to all schools on a first come, first served basis. If time had allowed I would have preferred to have spent time encouraging those schools who fit the low socio economic background and low engagement with music categories.”

“Low socio economic background was a given - this pretty much applies to all of our schools. I chose schools who I knew would commit to the project.”

All partners said that Snappy Operas was a close fit with their strategic objectives.

FIGURE 29: HOW WELL DID SNAPPY OPERAS FIT YOUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES?

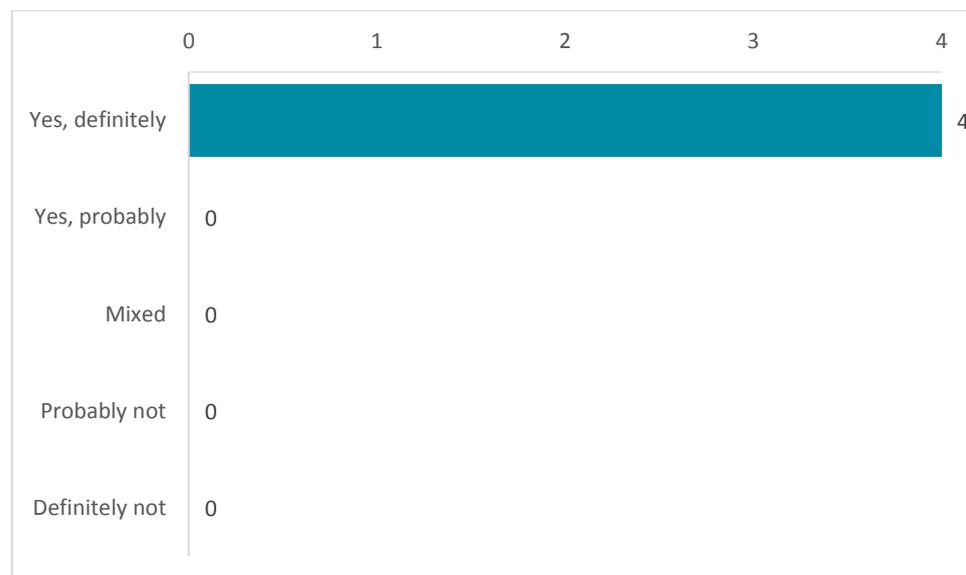


“A key element in our music strategy is for students to work with professional musicians/artists, to perform in inspiring venues, and to experience a professional rehearsal process - this project delivered that in spades!”

“The project itself tied in with our strategic objectives. More CPD might have been useful in order to ensure the project has a legacy in each school.”

All respondents to the question were satisfied with the contractual arrangements with Mahogany Opera Group.

FIGURE 30: WERE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP?



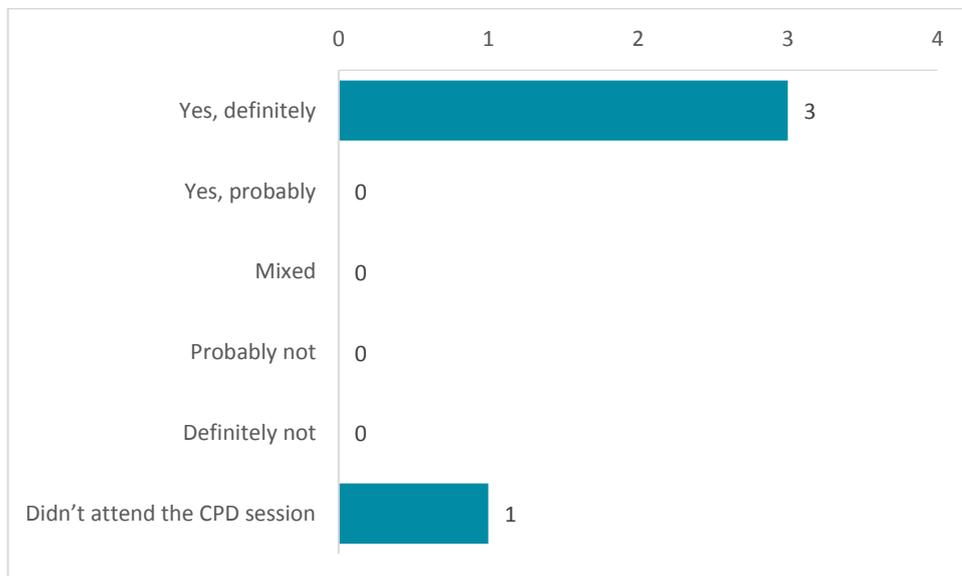
All respondents said the workshops were high quality.

FIGURE 31: VIEWS OF THE SNAPPY OPERAS WORKSHOPS IN SCHOOLS



Those who attended said the CPD session was useful, although participants might have appreciated more training.

FIGURE 32: WAS THE CPD SESSION USEFUL?



“It was very useful for logistics, although I had envisaged the session to be more creative for some reason. This is undoubtedly my misinterpretation.”

“The CPD session was more of a briefing session than a training session. But it was crucial in ensuring the teachers were on board and fully understood the requirements.”

The respondents said that the performance was high quality or mixed, with the latter being due to the schools’ response and the suitability of the opera.

FIGURE 33: WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THE SNAPPY OPERAS PERFORMANCE?



“There was a mix in quality of outcomes, but much does depend upon (a) the expertise of staff in school and (b) the musical quality of the operas. The two stand-out performances for us were Machine Dream and Peck.”

“This is not at all a reflection of the work carried out by the team but different schools had different ability levels and some of the operas were more accessible than others. I think it was interesting that the most confident performance was given by the school that had written their opera. This could have been because they felt they had more ownership of it or that they knew the music better before starting to stage the opera.”

“Thank you for making it such a success. The performance felt very well resourced which really raised the quality. I thought the performance was well thought through, including the introductions etc.”

OUTCOMES

Two partners said there is evidence that Snappy Operas increased schools’ interest in the arts. The other two said it was too soon to judge.

“The experience of a class putting on a performance in a major theatre in a short space of time clearly galvanized children and staff alike. Schools have told us about the positive effect on the children taking part, including some who have behavioural difficulties.”

“One school is certainly more engaged and have signed up to come to the Albert Hall with us in November.”

“The schools were all fairly engaged in the arts already. I hope that the project increased parents’ interest in the arts - the final performance was very well attended, something that I was not expecting.”

Three of the partners said they had worked on opera projects before. One worked with Nevill Holt Opera on Noye's Fludde, which was a singing project for 100 primary and secondary students. One had worked with Garsington Opera in the past.

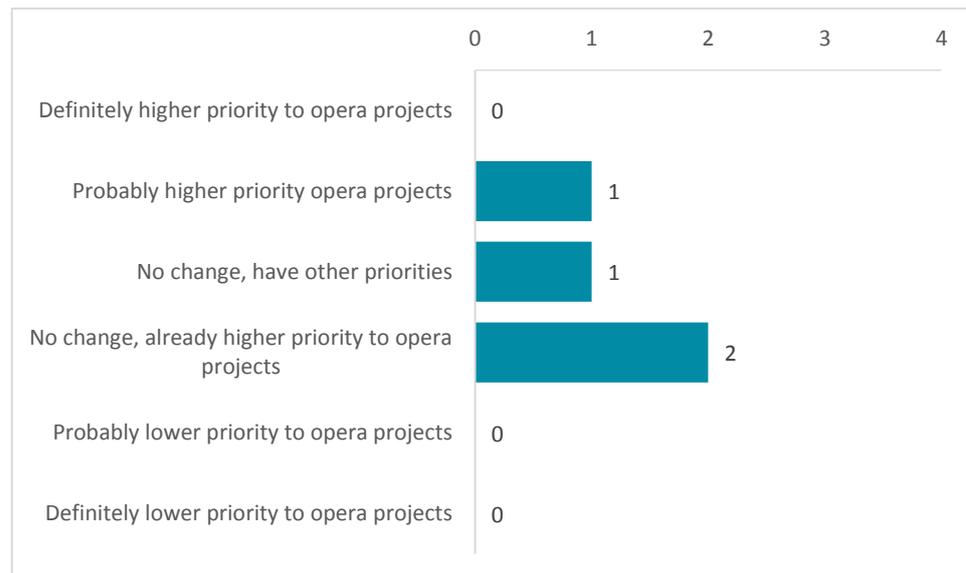
One partner said that Snappy Opera increased their priority to opera projects.

“We already give priority to opera across the Trust; as well as our relationship with NHO, Garsington have worked in our Lincs schools, who will also be doing the ROH Carmen project next year. We were delighted to be involved with Snappy Operas.”

“No change because our focus is offering a wide range and diverse mix of musical activities, including opera, to our pupils.”

“We will still continue to work with opera companies, but this is part of a mix with lots of other types of music and art forms so it can't take a huge priority above anything else.”

FIGURE 34: DID SNAPPY OPERAS CHANGE YOUR ORGANISATIONAL PRIORITY TO DELIVERING OPERA PROJECTS?



OVERALL VIEWS

Respondents were asked what advice they would give another regional partners involved in Snappy Operas. Answers were:

- “Ensure that all teachers involved are fully briefed and understand the commitment of the project, and that the Head Teacher is fully committed.”
- “I didn't have a full appreciation of what an amazing opportunity this was for schools until after the day in London in January - this could have been earlier in the process perhaps as I had not given schools all the information they needed prior to that day.”
- “If possible hold the final performance in a theatre rather than a school venue so you have full theatre facilities available. Holding it in a school meant that last minute requests from the creative and production team were harder to accommodate.”

- “Do it - it's a great project! Schools seem to really like it as it's something different and a very in-depth, cross-curricular project. You would want to ensure the schools are all fully committed and fully understand what's involved as this makes a huge difference to the success of project and the outcomes for the children.”

Respondents were asked what, if anything, is special about Mahogany Opera. Respondents made general comments, with one drawing attention to the customised approach:

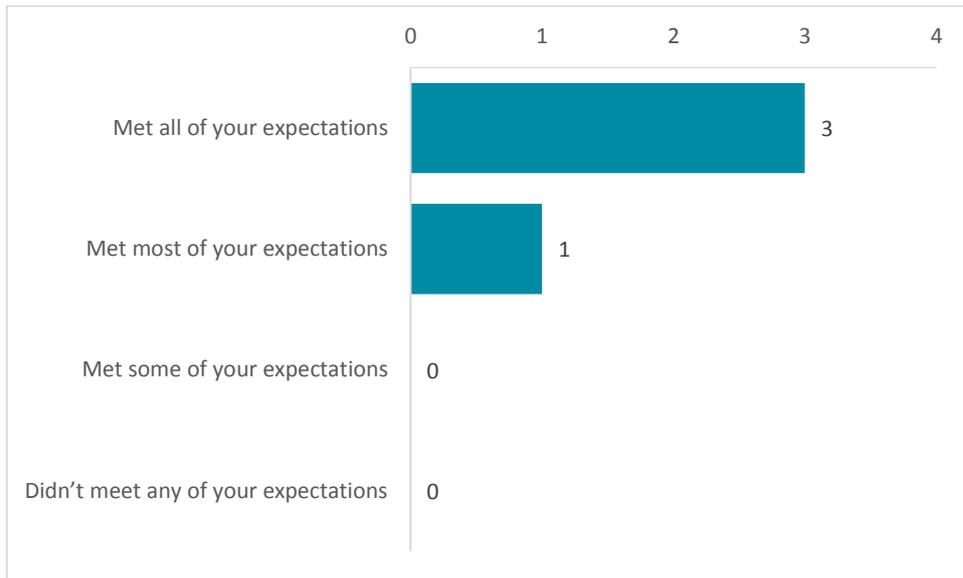
“The way the artists and the organisation as a whole works with the schools is special. Even though each school is just one of 25 across the country, it still feels that each school is special - the artists are committed to doing the best for every child.”

Respondents were asked if Mahogany Opera Group should change anything about Snappy Operas. Responses were:

- Extend the legacy. “If there is one thing I would like to see improved, it would be connecting the pieces to the singing programmes in our schools (e.g. range / styles of singing etc) - we would be very happy to help with this in the future.”
- Extend the time frame. “The time frame to deliver the operas (5-6 weeks at most) is too short, when the artistic team only visit on three occasions - it puts too much onus on the class teachers to deliver (who may not be specialists).”
- Refine the commissioning. “The key thing which does need attention is establishing similar musical demands in each piece. We engaged in the programme primarily to develop singing - to give children the experience of more ambitious music theatre; I don't think either Fox-Pop or Little England stretched the children's musicianship enough, and there seemed to be an over-eagerness to be trendy/down with the kids - the beatboxing element didn't really work; while the overt political agenda of Little England felt patronising. I realise this sounds old-fashioned, but Peck! felt the most appropriate piece for primary school students, enabling them to sing legato lines with a wide range... and also have fun.”
- Refine the tech specification. “We could have been more prepared for the final rehearsal and performance day if the tech rider had been more accurate. On the day lighting was requested that hadn't been mentioned previously. This meant that the relevant persons weren't booked to be on site that day and so no one was able to deal with these last minute lighting requests.”
- Roll out the programme – as is happening. “Access to the opera's for music hubs to either run their own snappy opera projects or be able to buy in a bespoke package with input from Mahogany.”

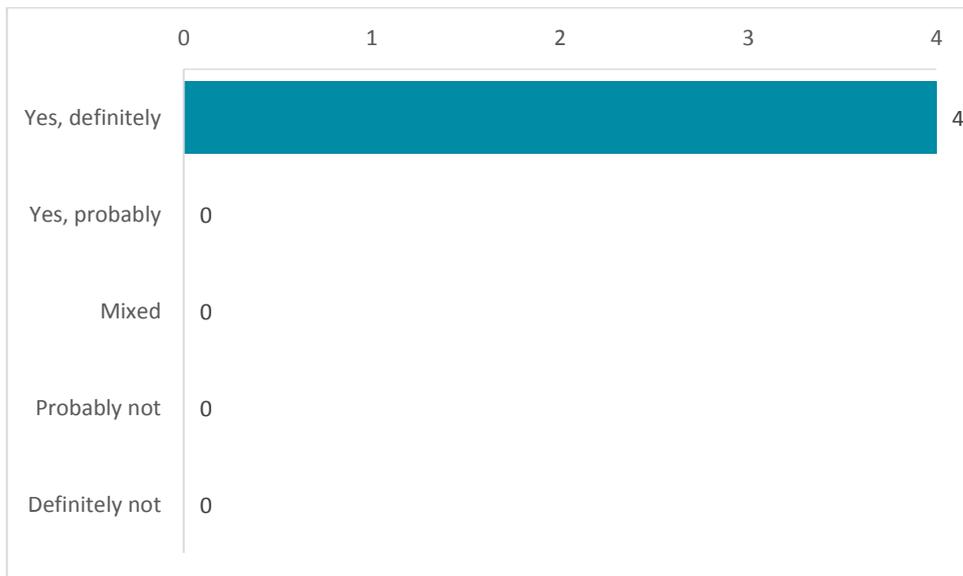
All respondents said that Snappy Operas met all or most of their expectations.

FIGURE 35: OVERALL, DID SNAPPY OPERAS MEET YOUR EXPECTATIONS?



All partners would recommend Mahogany Opera projects to schools and partners.

FIGURE 36: WOULD YOU RECOMMEND MAHOGANY OPERA PROJECTS TO SCHOOLS AND LOCAL PARTNERS?



SURVEY OF CREATIVE LEADERS

INTRODUCTION

We have 16 respondents.

The respondents have experience of different parts of the programme. And of all five regions.

FIGURE 37: WHICH PARTS OF SNAPPY OPERAS DID YOU WORK ON?

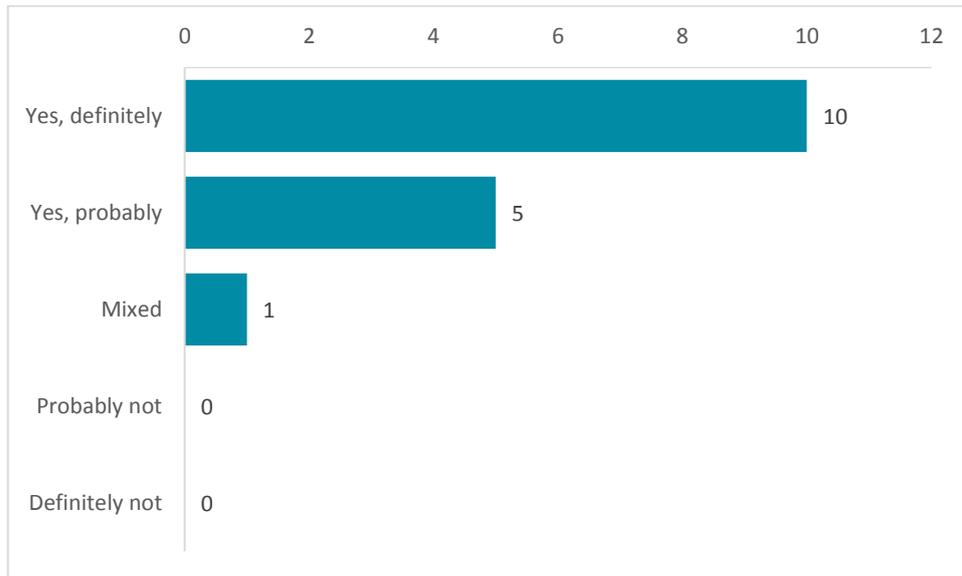


FIGURE 38: FIGURE 39: IN WHICH REGION(S) DID YOU WORK?



PROCESS

All respondents said that the objectives for Snappy Operas were clear from the start, except one person who joined a bit later. Comments were that core objectives were clear from the beginning and underlying assumptions became clearer over time.

FIGURE 40: WERE THE OBJECTIVES OF SNAPPY OPERAS CLEAR FROM THE START?

“I joined very late in the process so this was probably clearer to other team members.”

“Perhaps a more explicit focus that, given the challenge of the musical material, the process was more important than the product. This was discussed, but even more clarity would have been appreciated.”

“These have become clearer with each project I’ve been involved with.”

“It is very clear that Snappy Operas aims to educate children about opera, and give them an inspiring opportunity for musical performance. Other details or objectives are unclear.”

“It was great that I had worked on this project before and was able to build on my understanding of the work to advance further.”

Ten respondents said that the roles for the team member were clear. Comments were that the local creative team roles were clear, but the role of regional members was less so, which meant respondents sometimes didn’t know who to ask when there was a problem.

“I Felt very unsure throughout the process where my role began and ended. How much we were intended to be creative with the operas. I felt that flexibility was needed to tailor each opera to each school but this didn’t fit within the time frame. On reflection I would have tried to stick closer to the script in order to fit to the schedule, but this did not feel appropriate at the time.”

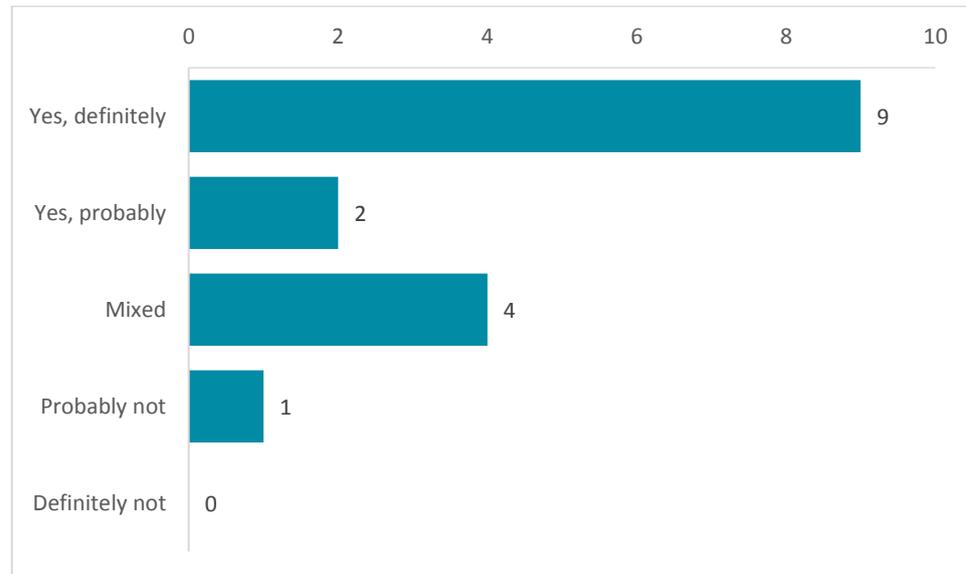
“Absolutely, for the main Creative Team (Director, Music Director, Rep.). However, there could have been further clarity around the role & duties of Company / Stage Manager, particularly in rehearsals.”

“Mostly, but there often seemed to be miscommunication with the regional SM - this may have been down to how they perceive their role.”

“The roles of everyone in the creative team were very clear. The roles of everyone in the central team at MOG were less clear. This made it difficult to know whom to contact when issues and questions arose.”

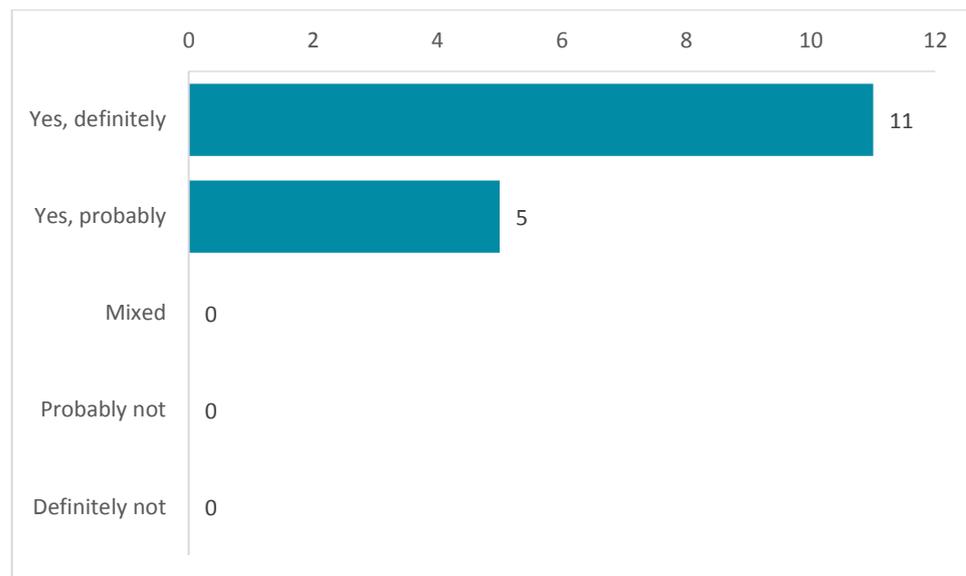
“I think the company manager role is always a little unclear and I am not sure who is meant to be leading on that - I end up having to do quite a lot of it on the ground when we arrive.”

FIGURE 41: WERE THE ROLES FOR THE TEAM MEMBERS IN SNAPPY OPERAS CLEAR?



The creative leaders said the teams worked well together. Any challenges seemed to arise from unclear roles.

FIGURE 42: DID THE CREATIVE TEAM WORK WELL TOGETHER?



“The team were fantastic to work with. Better communication on my own part could probably have made things run more smoothly, as well as clearer definition of roles.”

“The main Creative Team (Director, Music Director, Rep.) absolutely, yes. Again, there was room for minor improvement regarding support from Company / Stage Management. However, further definition of this role would easily overcome any problems. In general, good collaboration between everyone.”

“I feel there was sometimes tricky negotiations about how much time each leader got with the young people to focus on music/staging.”

“Generally a good team to work with. Not sure either of them were comfortable or so adept at handling the discipline difficulties we faced, particularly in the 2nd session when the class teacher wasn’t there. A tough gig for anyone but perhaps their approach was too soft in that situation and it got a bit out of hand.”

“Although we planned well together and held similar views, delivery often felt rather one-sided.”

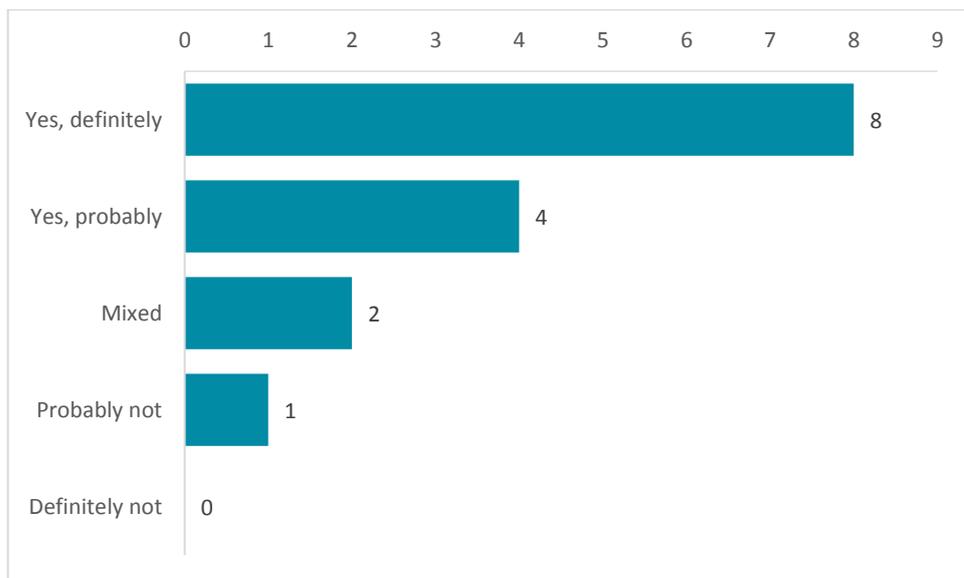
“Absolutely loved working with them!”

“We had such a lovely team. I loved working them and felt everyone really pulled their weight as well as supporting one another.”

“It’s a tricky brief with limited time but fortunately working with a pre-established team allows you to have the shorthand in those more pressured moments. I think there was an overarching sense of trust and understanding within disciplines and we have strong expectations of the work we can deliver and the results that can be achieved.”

12 leaders said they had enough information about Snappy Operas at the beginning. Gaps were in particular that leaders would have liked more information on the design kits and also on roles, as mentioned above.

FIGURE 43: DID YOU HAVE ENOUGH INFORMATION ABOUT SNAPPY OPERAS AT THE BEGINNING?



“Even though I missed the induction / networking event on 8th January, plenty of information was provided in a timely manner.”

“It was only at the training day that I discovered I’d be learning/playing all 5 Snappies. The contract I’d signed laid out the time commitment in terms of the briefing and performance days and the school sessions, but there was no indication of the difficulty and volume of the music and time needed to learn and practise it (Probably 20+ hrs in total). It would have been useful to be able to plan for that further in advance in what was a very busy period of work for me.”

“The workshop day was particularly helpful in getting lots of information across about how the project would work. It was also great to get an overview of the whole thing and meet members of the other teams. Introductions to the pieces by the composers/librettists themselves were also really helpful. The design element and the practicalities of how this would work with the schools could have been a bit clearer: the design packs were very creative but a little confusing as to what was whose responsibility and how many of each thing should be made etc; it felt more artistic in places than fully practical and comprehensive for the schools and for me as the director, reading in isolation after the workshop day.”

“I would like more time with the design kits to fully understand what we're receiving. Because of the group/regional element of this work, I am aware decisions need to be made for the collective. It would be great to have the design pack and scores in advance of the launch date (or to have a separate date in following that) to feedback into the design pack with greater effect.”

“More information about some of the complexities of the music and also knowing more about details about the band, and full scores, further in advance would have been appreciated.”

14 of the 16 creative leaders said that communication from the central team was appropriate. Comments were that the team was extremely supportive and coordination has got even better with a new post appointed.

“Very communicative and quick to respond. Sometimes ended up with too many emails to effectively sort through especially outside of allocated working days.”

“Absolutely - the support and communication from the central Mahogany Opera Group team was outstanding! Thank you!”

“I always felt supported and valued by the office team.”

“This has always been good, but seemed even more detailed and professional with Marc’s input this time.”

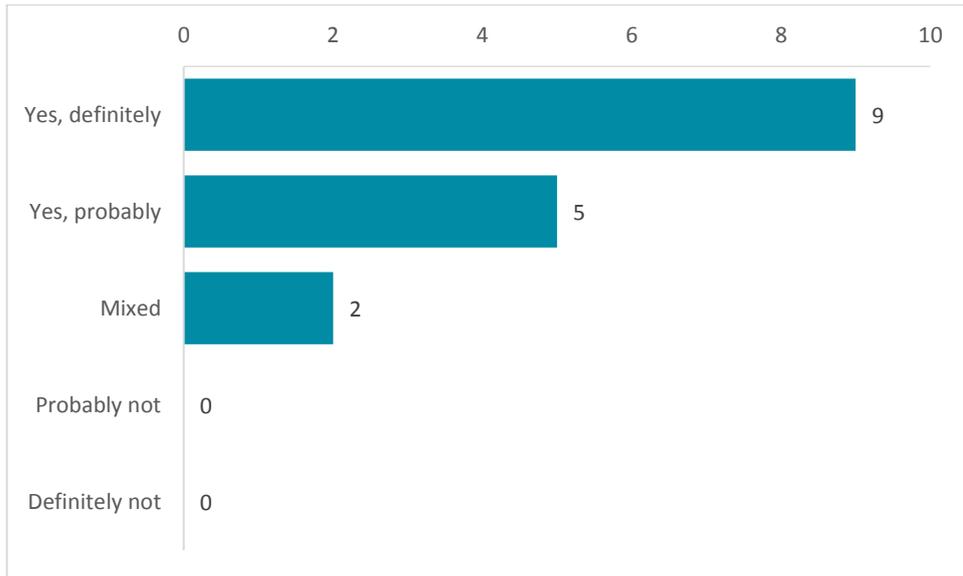
“Communication was very clear at the start of the project, but I wasn't always informed of changes as the project went on. For example, one of our rehearsals was rescheduled, which we only discovered when we spotted discrepancies between rehearsal sheets. I had to find short-notice cover and rearrange my travel plans in order to accommodate this change. Also, some of the Big History changes were only emailed to the music directors, and obviously the reps need to be informed of these things as well!”

“Fantastic, prompt support from the team whenever needed.”

“Lovely to have everyone's support as always and to have Marc on board as well providing another dimension of contact and liaison between hubs, teachers and artists. We had issues with the communication of central props but everyone tried their best to remedy this.”

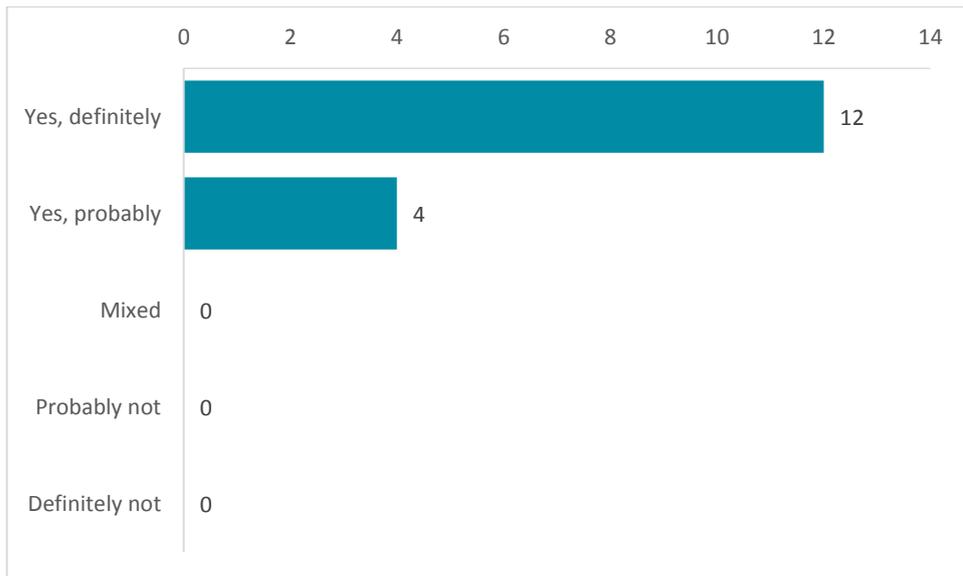
“I sometimes got confused about who was in charge of what. I seemed to get random emails from random people, so when I needed something I didn't know who to write to.”

FIGURE 44: WAS COMMUNICATION FROM THE CENTRAL TEAM OF MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP APPROPRIATE?



All creative leaders said they got the support they needed from Mahogany Opera Group.

FIGURE 45: DID YOU GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEEDED FROM MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP?



“Great that members of Mahogany were able to support in difficult areas. Not sure I had realised going in how much support was available and may have tried to build too much into my own role.”

“The team were very responsive to questions and queries when asked.”

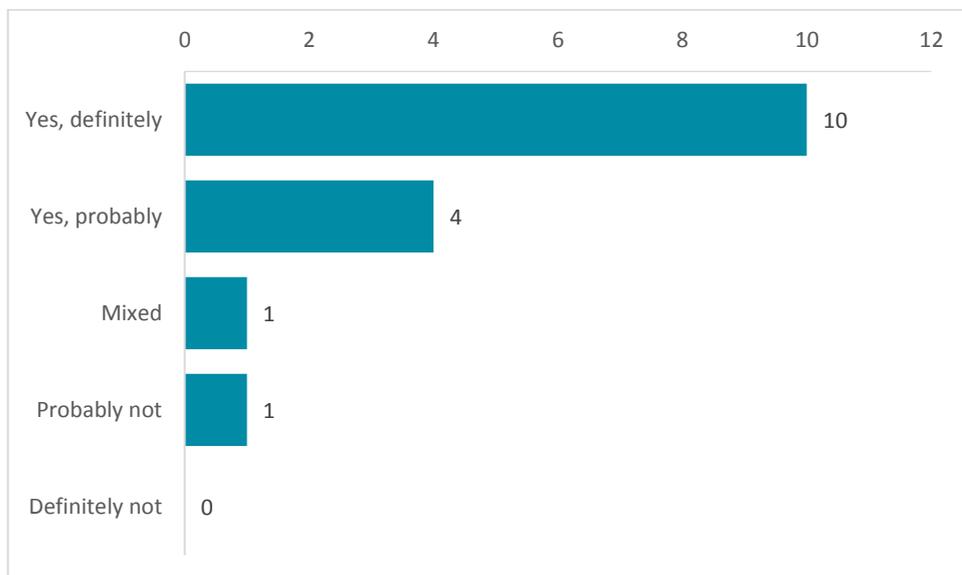
“All emails and calls were followed up without delay. It was nice to have three visits from the team too.”

“Absolutely, they were wonderful.”

“Absolutely brilliant team working all hours to deliver this wonderful and crazy project. The only issues we had were when it came to delivery of central props. Our Stage Manager was really on this, but we had problems in the week of performances with only a few of the central props with us in rehearsal before the final showing. This is a tough job for the young people but they rose to it so all credit to them. Mahogany also worked with us as hard as they could to get things sorted.”

14 leaders said they were satisfied with the contractual arrangements. Three leaders mentioned a desire that fees include per diems, and two said that the contract didn't reflect the amount of planning time.

FIGURE 46: WERE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP?



“The contract was fine but again, didn't leave flexibility for the amount of work needed outside of the allotted rehearsal days.”

“For creative team members working away from home, particularly in London, per diems to cover meal costs would be helpful.”

“Per diems would be appreciated. It became very expensive, finding places to eat. Often work continues in to the night, altogether and it feels necessary to find somewhere comfortable to eat, relax and discuss the day's work and the work for the next day. Also I did

a lot of planning and re-planning according to the schools development during the process, which could be reflected by a planning fee.”

Ten respondents said they had the resources they needed. Five leaders commented that they would have liked scores earlier.

FIGURE 47: DID YOU HAVE THE RESOURCES YOU NEEDED TO CARRY OUT YOUR ROLE ON SNAPPY OPERAS?



“All resources were eventually provided. More information at the start of the process may have made it easier to source needed items earlier on.”

“Keyboards were organised by the music service when necessary, scores were sent in (very) good time.”

“I was honoured to be asked to play for the recording for the learning resources and totally up for it, but given how much difficult music there was, it would have been really helpful to have the scores more in advance. I think it was 5 days or so before that I got the music, but I was working most of those and actually ended up cancelling something in order to have more time to prepare. I appreciate that the composers were probably still rewriting following feedback from the training day, but perhaps in future the training day could be earlier in the process to allow for this.”

“Very dependent on the schools and hub. It would be great if the hub could have supplied more singing support to some of the schools.”

“It's really important for a challenging (and often stressful) project like Snappy Operas that we have all the resources we need well in advance and in an easy-to-use format. I received my vocal score less than a week before the project began - ideally, I would have had this a month in advance, or 2 weeks at a minimum. My full score arrived in plenty of time, but with pages missing, which I had to print off the electronic files and insert into my hard-copy score, resulting in a very awkward and confusing series of page turns - this was really the last thing I should have had to worry about on performance day! Finally, it would have been REALLY

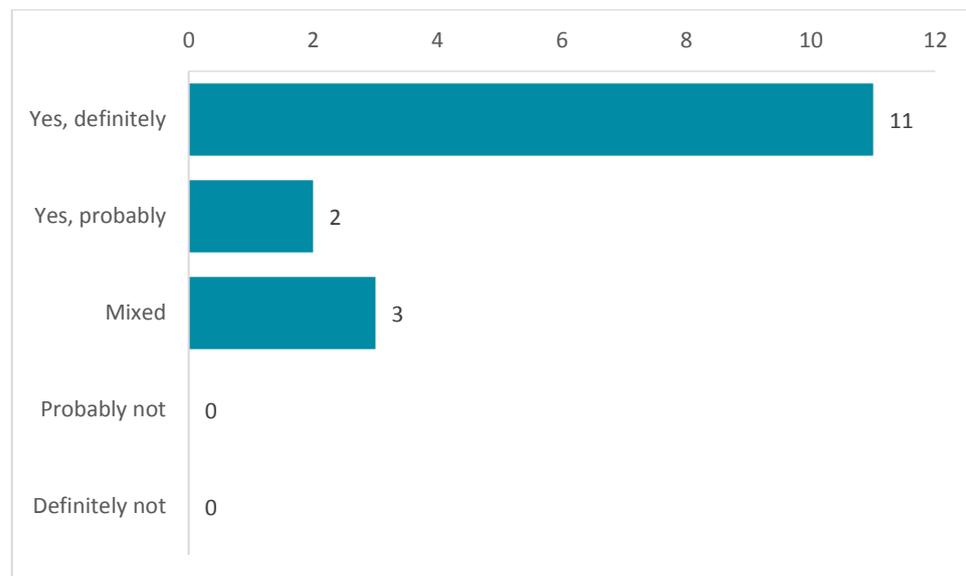
helpful if the keyboard had come with an instruction manual, or a short guide as to how to find the preset sounds.”

“The central props were an issue in our setting. Teachers helped us with printing of other resources and Mahogany were great in sourcing additional props where necessary to make the young people have the best time and feel valued.”

“The scores arrived on the Friday, and I started rehearsing on the Tuesday. This was very late, and made me feel the whole thing was on the back foot. As with all freelancers, I have many balls in the air, and those three days were already taken up with other work, so literally the only time I had to look at the score was on the train to Slough. PDFs are not the same thing, as particularly when you are having to work fast, you need to mark things up on paper. I received lots of emails from Mahogany well in advance of the scores arriving, but because we were told that the scores we looked at in January were not the finish product it all seemed a bit academic. There wasn’t much point in my learning something that I’d have to unlearn later on.”

13 leaders said the amount of travelling was reasonable. Arrangements provided appropriate allowance for travelling, but sometimes didn't allow for time to eat lunch.

FIGURE 48: WAS THE AMOUNT OF TRAVELLING ON SNAPPY OPERAS REASONABLE?



“Time between rehearsals sometimes did not account for travel time, meaning no lunch break for team and arriving to afternoon rehearsals late.”

“The accommodation was ideally located to easily access the schools and final performance venue.”

“It was very clear that real care was taken to make sure our trains would give us enough (but not too much) time to get to and from schools.”

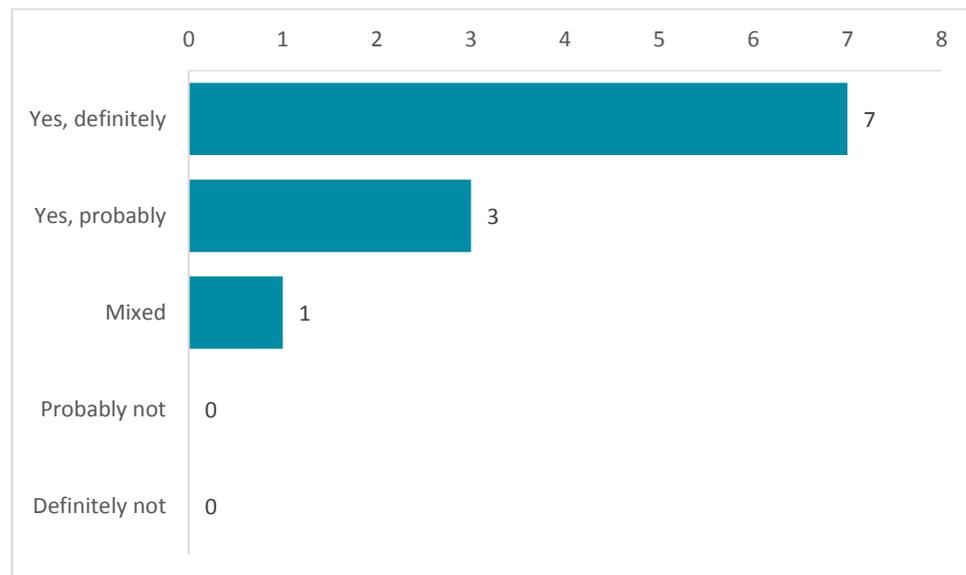
“I am very happy to travel for good work and the travel arrangements organised by the Mahogany Team were great.”

“There were some lunch breaks that were fully taken up by traveling, leaving almost no time to eat lunch.”

“I appreciate that we were able to stay in a hotel. Even though Slough is close, it was great not to have to commute early in the morning.”

Almost all those who attended the events thought the networking part was useful.

FIGURE 49: WAS THE NETWORKING PART OF SNAPPY OPERAS (E.G. 18TH JANUARY MEETING) USEFUL?



“It was wonderful to meet other people doing my job and share experiences.”

“I think it was very helpful in identifying what the challenges would be with each piece.”

“Invaluable. Although a two-day meeting (or 1.5) would have been even better in hindsight. It takes time to process the works after sight reading them and feedback would be much more useful after sleeping on our work on day 1.”

“Not sure how much networking I did but it is incredibly valuable to have an opportunity to meet the artists and makers of Snappy and to have an opportunity to share practise.”

All leaders said the role of teachers was clear, a great improvement on year one (where 6/10 said the role wasn't clear). Comments were that the CPD helped but schools varied in how seriously they took the project.

“Group meeting with all teachers was very helpful for this.”

“Although I don't think some realised how much work would be involved.”

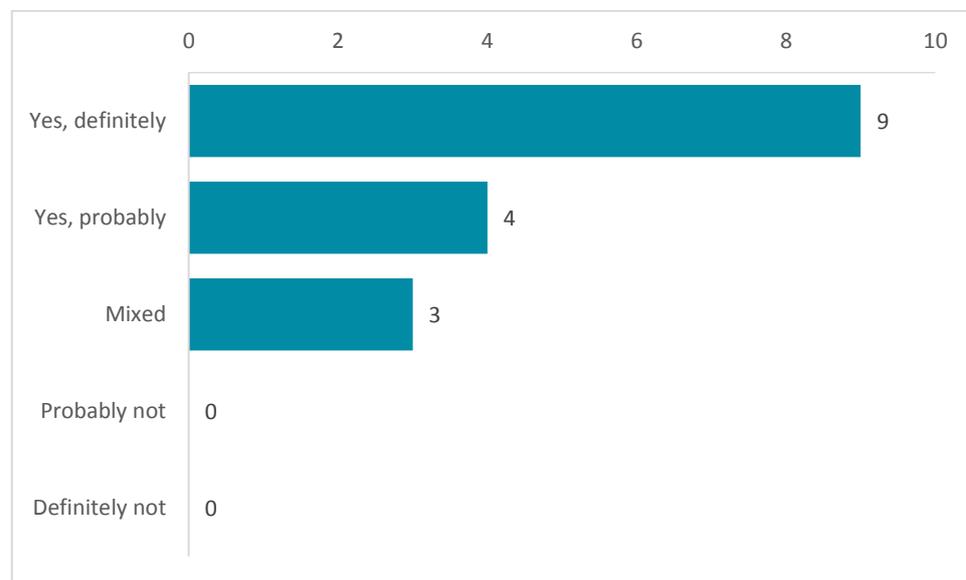
“School dependent. Some had little idea of how to support an external group. One felt that some were indeed critical or suspicious of the project from the beginning. That changes as we went on with most. Others however remained fairly clueless and not helpful for either the discipline in the room or the creative process.”

“It was clear to us, but I'm not sure it was clear to them! We had a very mixed experience with teachers - one school was brilliantly supportive and made our job so much easier, while on the other extreme, one school didn't even have a teacher in the rehearsals - it was just us and the children. At one school, the teacher mentioned that they had received communication only the week before half-term, which made it really difficult to fit their responsibilities into their timetable. Ideally, this information would be going out at the start of the term.”

“To me, yes, although some teachers did not engage with their role (whether this is because they chose not to or because they didn't know their role, I cannot tell).”

“I think Mahogany made it clear, but perhaps it could have been reinforced.”

FIGURE 50: WAS THE ROLE OF TEACHERS CLEAR?



63% of leaders said the teachers made a positive contribution compared to 45% in year 1. The reminder, in both years, said contribution varied between schools. One comment was that schools were less able to support groups that spanned classes.

“Very wide ranging levels of input from teachers. Some extremely unhelpful, some extremely positive.”

“Some teachers were, of course, more hands-on than others. But, because the expectations had been clearly outlined in the CPD, the Creative Team felt comfortable encouraging teachers to get more involved where necessary.”

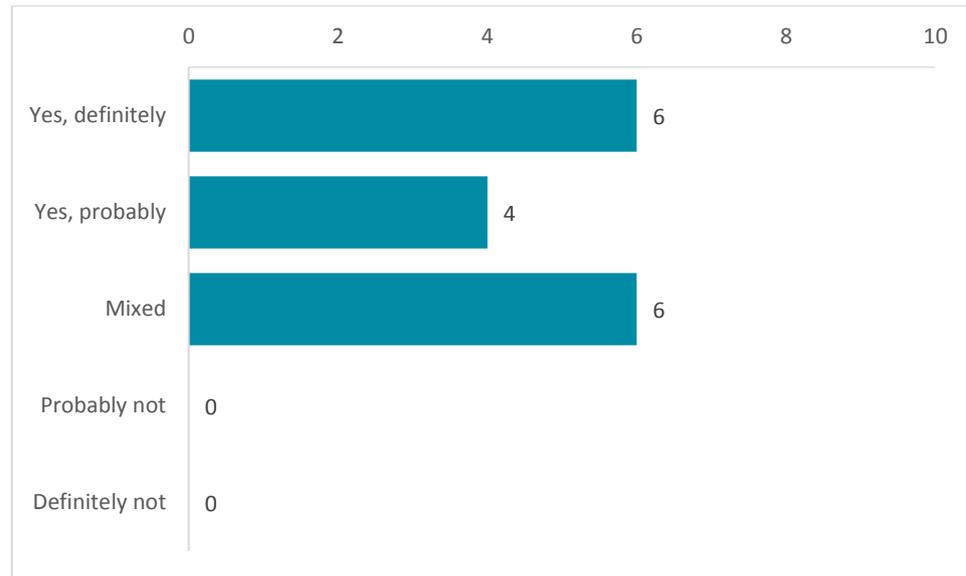
“Some were exceptional, others I think felt apprehensive about the process and therefore maybe shied away from putting on the learning resources in class for example.”

“Some go to town on costumes and props. Some are able to do this while supporting the individual class members to excel in the performance as well. Others were unable to keep basic control of their class and offered the minimum of complimentary support in terms of design / costume etc.”

“Full classes, or existing groups (rather than 'hand-picked' students) are also much more likely to get proper support in school as they have designated times to meet within the school timetable. It's difficult for a random group to be supported within school outside of sessions with the Snappy Team.”

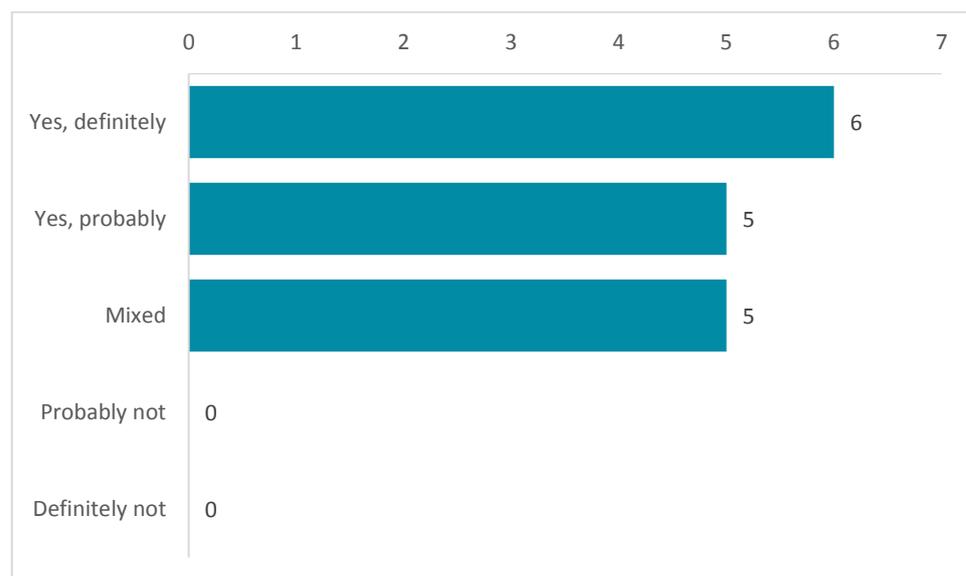
“Costumes and props were made in great detail for most schools. When teachers actively participate and engage, children's enjoyment soars.”

FIGURE 51: DID TEACHERS MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE DELIVERY OF SNAPPY OPERAS?



11 of the creative leaders said the children were easy to engage. However, this varied depending on the nature of the opera, the involvement of the teachers,

FIGURE 52: WERE THE CHILDREN EASY TO ENGAGE?



"I found some of the operas to be more engaging for the kids than others. But this was also dependent on the school group. I found it easier to engage the young people with the more explicitly sung material. The more musical the material the more engaging and interesting it is for the children to work on, because there is something clear and characterful for them to respond to emotionally and physically."

"Again, participation and engagement of the teachers is key. We were mostly very lucky."

"We had brilliant young people who engaged across the project. For some, this was easier than others but I was delighted with the engagement the project received. There were some brilliant and unexpected moments in the performance which were a testament to how much the children had invested, across the board, in this work."

All leaders said the repertoire was appropriate for the children, although some elements were challenging for some of the children.

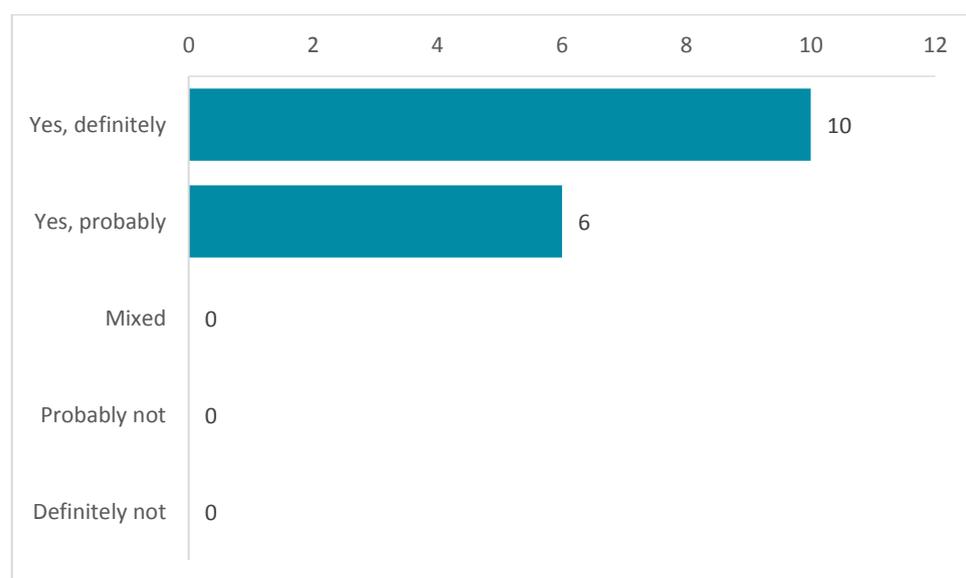
"Range of repertoires felt appropriately matched to each school."

"I think there were some textual (and musical) challenges in some of the pieces that were a little out of reach for some of the young people."

"Interestingly we had a young group for Big History, but with edits/adjustments their 'innocence' made the piece work. I did have to do a considered edit though so that it felt appropriate for them. We found the young group who performed World's Beating Heart to be too young - but also the school had some problems. Luckily the costume ideas saved the day."

"I was nervous about elements of one of the operas but I think the delivery style, and teacher support meant that the young people found this a rewarding experience to be a part of and were proud of the outcome of their work."

FIGURE 53: WAS THE REPERTOIRE APPROPRIATE FOR THE AGE OF CHILDREN?



14 leaders said they used the online resources for Snappy Operas. Comments of the value of the online resources had these themes:

- For leaders to understand the score. “I used them to get to know the scores as well as my own prep.”
- For students to rehearse. “Students were accessing the music online and revising the music / lyrics at home, giving them further independence and ownership of the performances.” “We encouraged children to access the sound tracks online when at home, but some don’t have Wi-Fi access, so perhaps there could be a DVD recording as well.”
- For teachers to understand the work. “The backing tracks were useful for schools, and we made sure we knew them so we didn’t deviate so much as to cause confusion.”
- To support teacher-led sessions. “The schools get the most out of these resources. Many talked through the story and sang along to the recordings.” “I used them only in directing teachers and children to the website. Those who used it clearly benefitted from practising with the online resources.” “The schools used them between our sessions to rehearse. Although once we’d established our own version, teachers took to recording our rehearsals so as not to confuse the children with different versions of the piece.”
- To explain what would be happening. “Definitely enhance the participative process being able to show teachers and children what sort of thing they could be doing.”
- To save time in the workshops. “I think most of the kids had practiced with and looked at the online resources which when it came to rehearsing was extremely useful.”

“Personally, I used them to prepare. We did not use them within sessions but teachers were encouraged to use them between sessions and you could tell which children had listened to the learning resources.”

- To support costume and prop design. “I used the design pack for reference, and it helped when talking through costume and props with teachers.”

Ten of the respondents said the project was well organised overall. The exception was providing a guidance on details of aspects of the project, such as the operation of the hub and the arrangements for the performances.

“I was booked with plenty of notice and had the music in good time. Accommodation and travel was all smooth and I felt I could always ask any questions I needed to.”

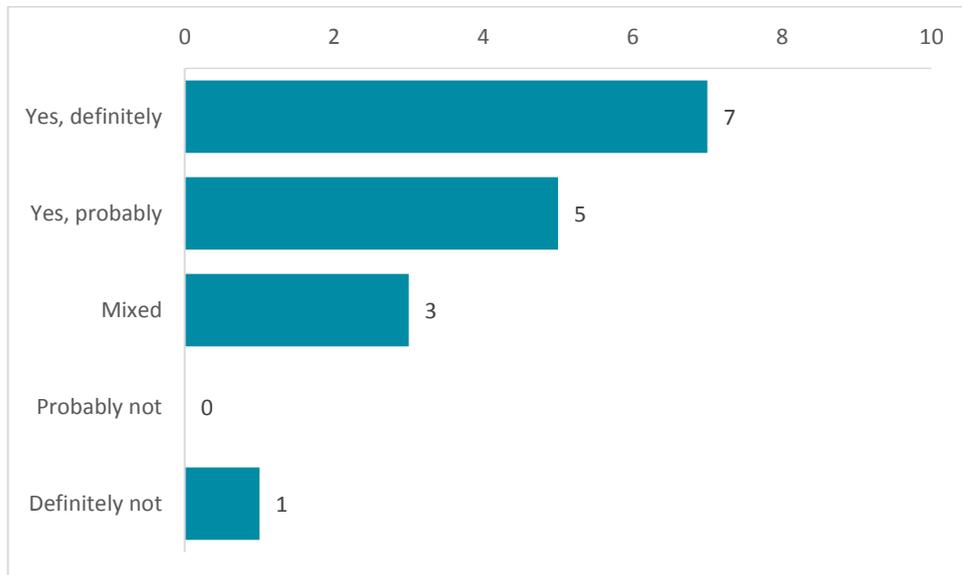
“Considering how complex the project was, it worked very well.”

“Mostly - nothing was badly organised, there were just some clerical errors (I think my first contract was for staging director...!) But nothing which really mattered and all the important stuff was totally fine.”

“Naturally it is the local engagement that felt the least well structured. Perhaps a few more guidelines would have been useful, or a bit more clarity about the nature of the event - how to seat the children and their parents etc. In the end it was my call to sit all 120 kids and make it a performance for and by them first and foremost. This was a little contentious on the day as the seating then was laid out in a way that the adults were far away in the hall, and there weren’t enough seats.”

12 leaders said that Snappy Operas was well organised. Comments were that these are complex projects that require piecing together many different elements.

FIGURE 54: OVERALL, WAS SNAPPY OPERAS WELL ORGANISED?



“The only organisational issue we had was prop delivery.”

“It sometimes felt that there was too much organisation needed on our side. I had to factor in a lot of extra time to work out / edit the operas for our different school groups. Each opera had an additional element as well - like beat-box, voice over, game-structure, percussion, all of which make it interesting - but need a clear separate approach for each. I think generally the mix paid off, but sometimes I wished the ambitions for the project were more streamlined and not so bitty. It's hard to get a grasp on five such varied projects simultaneously while you have to come together as a new team, figure out the dynamics of the school/teachers/hub and provide an engaging series of workshops for kids.”

“We had a rather late cancellation from a school (no fault of MOG) which led to rearranging sessions on two extra days - but this was done swiftly and we were happy to accommodate.”

“The communication issues, paired with a lot of details falling between the cracks, made the project feel chaotic. Our stage manager was only booked the night before our first rehearsal, and her accommodation wasn't booked for two of the rehearsal periods. The sound files for Big History were really difficult to work with, and in the end, we heard them for the first time on the day of the performance. A lot of the prop boxes arrived late at schools, and the delivery of the set was also late, meaning we were unable to rehearse with it before performance day.”

“A bit more clarity and earlier master documents for design and props, and information given to the CSM would have been really useful, but everything came together well.”

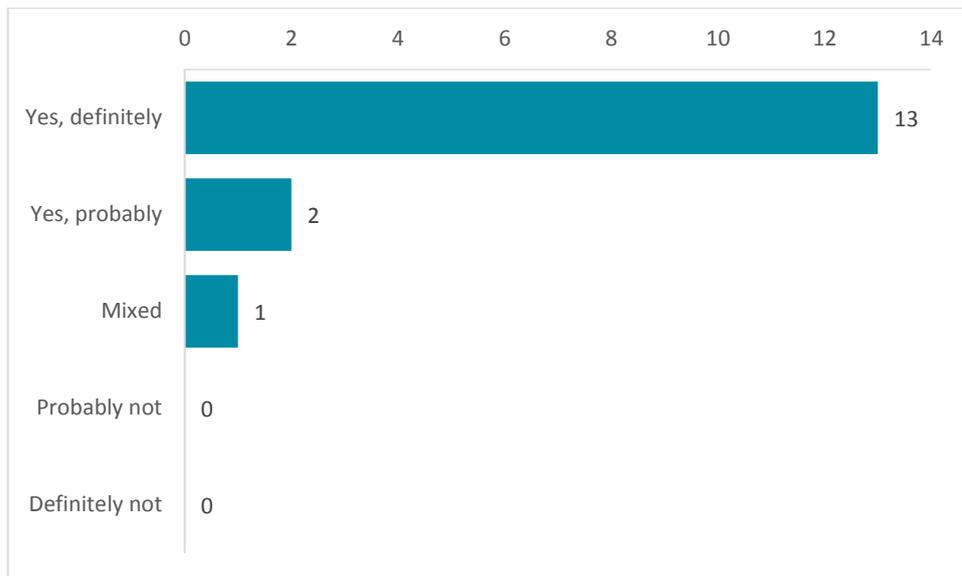
“I think it's a credit to Mahogany that they manage to deliver this project in five settings at once. Absolutely brilliant and takes a huge amount of detailed planning and organisation which they do incredibly well.”

“I appreciate how hard it is to organise all this, but sometimes it felt manic, and I wonder if it needed to be so rushed. A longer time-line would have helped.”

OUTCOMES

15 leaders said the project was enjoyable. One respondent said it was too stressful.

FIGURE 55: WAS YOUR WORK ON SNAPPY OPERAS ENJOYABLE?



“An enjoyable challenge working on some difficult and high quality music - Peck and Machine Dream were particular favourites. Despite being also the hardest!”

“Ultimately yes. I think the level of challenge goes up and down over the weeks. When you would have more across-the-board support from the hub, plus some per diems for morale, plus operas in a more ready-to-go state, then it would I think be a more over-all enjoyable process. “

“I loved the operas, though struggled a little with WBH - I believe it could have been refined a little from the creative process. This round of Snappies was the toughest for me due to feeling as though I was the lead member of staff and it was less of a combined effort.”

“Working with the children is so rewarding!”

“I felt I grew so much during this project! Thank you for asking me to be part of it.”

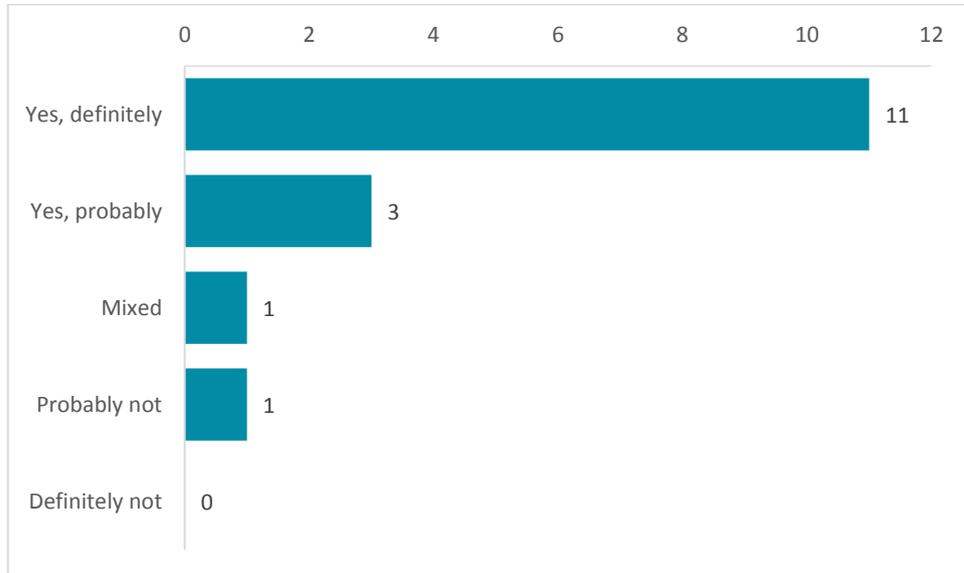
“Loved it!”

“I am always delighted when they pull it off(!) but I love having the opportunity to work with these amazing young people across the country, to bring them the joy of making opera and taking ownership over the work they create.”

“I really liked the operas, and the creative team and stage management were great.”

14 leaders were proud of the quality of the process and product. Three would have liked more time.

FIGURE 56: WERE YOU PROUD OF THE QUALITY OF THE PROCESS AND PRODUCT FOR SNAPPY OPERAS?



"I was very impressed by the format and its use to engage students with curriculum topics. Very impressed by the leap in confidence over a short period of time. Very impressed by how much was achieved in such short rehearsal period."

"The process was great fun for us and the young people, I feel we needed more rehearsal time to get the product slightly tidier. Even though the project is very process focussed, I feel we could have had a little more polish."

"There's always more we could have given the young people and things we could have done differently, but the process was hugely positive and will remain in memories for a long time to come."

"I think the project needs more time. The children had so much more potential than we were able to tap, and it was a constant struggle to balance the need to keep on top of our short rehearsal timescale with our desire to work in a more creative way with the children. I'm not sure they always understood why they were doing what they were doing. Also the cardboard sets/props looked really cheap and didn't last well at all in transit between schools! Ideally, these would be from stronger material, or a separate set provided for each region."

"One of the highlights of my career."

"I was pleased with the majority of what was created and think, given the timeframe, every young person did brilliantly. Music learning was a little waylaid due to snow and I would love to have seen where things could have been pushed to had we been able to move forward more quickly in week two."

"I wish we had more time to prepare and at least another week of rehearsing."

Respondents were asked if their work on Snappy Operas gave them any insights of value for their participative work. Responses had these themes:

- Building ownership. “To sometimes let go of the detail in order to balance the different elements of music-theatre work encouraging participants to have the best overall experience of many different art forms.” “The value of giving as much ownership as possible to the children involved- getting them involved with decision regarding staging and character. Allowing them to inhabit the characters as early as possible in the process means they can make considered decisions later on.” “I really saw the importance of engaging participants in the process and the reasons behind the process. Where we had time to do this, the children were so much more engaged and invested.” “It’s constantly treading the line between continually moving forward whilst allowing space and freedom for trial and error. I’m still working this out.”
- Impact on children. “It clarified for me my thoughts on the radical nature of storytelling for and by young people.” “The right team can produce incredible results and explore so many great possibilities.” “I just think everyone regardless, race, religion, background, area etc should have access to a project such as this. It is not about making opera singers but taking part in the creative process has so many different benefits.”
- Intensity. “It can be inspiring and frustrating, refreshing and exhausting. I’m not sure if these thoughts have any value, but I often came away more exhausted working as part of team with 30 children than I do running workshops solo to 5x this number!”
- Collaboration. “It was great to share ideas with other colleagues, especially on things like vocal exercises and drama games to use in other participative work.” “It’s always great to see other facilitators work, and share practice; working with such a skilled practitioner as Greg Hallam was particularly inspiring in this way. It was also a great opportunity to challenge myself and learn some lessons about how I run a room of children.”
- School low understanding of music. “On this project, I think what I really noticed is how the culture of music is being eradicated in schools. The number of teachers that said they were surprised by some of the children who are 'low ability'. In the Snappy Opera space, these children's ability was soaring!”

“Since Snappies1, I’ve re-evaluated how I work with people of all age groups. Where a few years ago, I prided myself on efficiency, I’ve learned that it doesn’t always yield the most profound artistic experiences. Yet of course the ‘snappy’ nature of the project suggests working quickly towards an end goal.”

Respondents were asked if their work on Snappy Operas gave them any insights of value for their creative work. Responses particularly mentioned versatility and resourcefulness:

- “Ways to tie to curriculum.”
- “I’ve realised I prefer a devising setting and I prefer when I’m the composer.”
- “Ideas about simple design concepts e.g. making bin facades from cardboard.”
- “I can definitely lead a band now!”
- “It’s always useful to gain more experience working in different environments and also to gain skills on things like vocal technique and general musical skills to take to other creative work. “

- “Getting to stage five different bits of repertoire simultaneously is a great exercise in thinking about the diversity and originality of direction.”

Respondents were asked what, if anything, is special about Mahogany Opera Group. Responses were:

- Ambition. “I feel it is really bold to commission five (well, ten!) new short operas from young people from big-name composers and librettists. I think 'Snappy Operas' is a bold and ambitious, but very fun and playful, project that will inspire many young people.”
- Commissions. “Commitment to commissioning and or performing new opera with all groups- professional, amateur, or young people.”
- Proactivity. “Everything! A general willingness to do stuff, and not be sniffy or snobbish about anything.”
- Attention to detail. “It’s just awesome: from the inspiration right down to the design packs and everything in between. Creative teams and young people alike are so lucky to be involved with this from the start, as I believe the ‘package’ has huge potential.”
- Passion. “The inventiveness, creativity and passion.” “There's real heart, and a personal touch, in this project and the way in which it has been curated; this is particularly evident in the chosen artists and a sense of shared vision.
- Scale. “Reaching all of those people in one go is such a strength of MOG. I would love to know there were some next steps for those young people who we ignite over the course of this project.”
- Impact. “It was very apparent how much the children gained from the experience which was really nice to see.”

“Some elements of Snappy Operas are present in other companies but not a project of this scale, and with the same elements coming together as a whole.”

“The majority of my work is with participation teams across the country but currently, I think Mahogany is reaching the most people with a high artistic level of engagement.”

Creative leaders were asked if there was anything that Mahogany Opera Group should change about Snappy Operas. Responses were:

- More time, especially more lead-in time before delivery and more rehearsal time.
- Higher planning fee.
- Stronger structure for ideas sharing and support between teachers outside of sessions.
- More flexibility built into the structure for the creative team.
- Stronger commitment from schools to attend all rehearsals.
- Leaders able to comment on the design elements.
- Not sharing props between the venues.
- Simplify instrumentation. “It seemed like a waste of money to have a trumpeter, cellist and double bass player booked for a whole day but only to play for one piece. Either we could have had the all those players in every opera - with clever orchestration there need not be a balance problem with that, or just 3 musicians, and used that money to

pay for the creative team to spend one extra day going round each school for one hour each prior to the final performance day.”

SURVEY OF COMPOSERS AND LIBRETTISTS INTRODUCTION

We had seven responses relating to all of the regions.

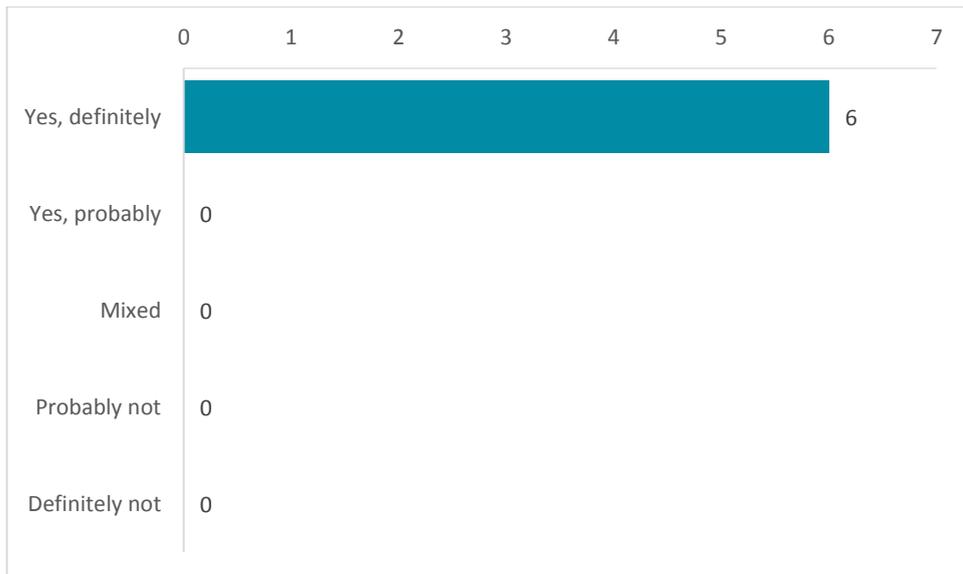
FIGURE 57: IN WHICH REGION(S) DID YOU WORK?



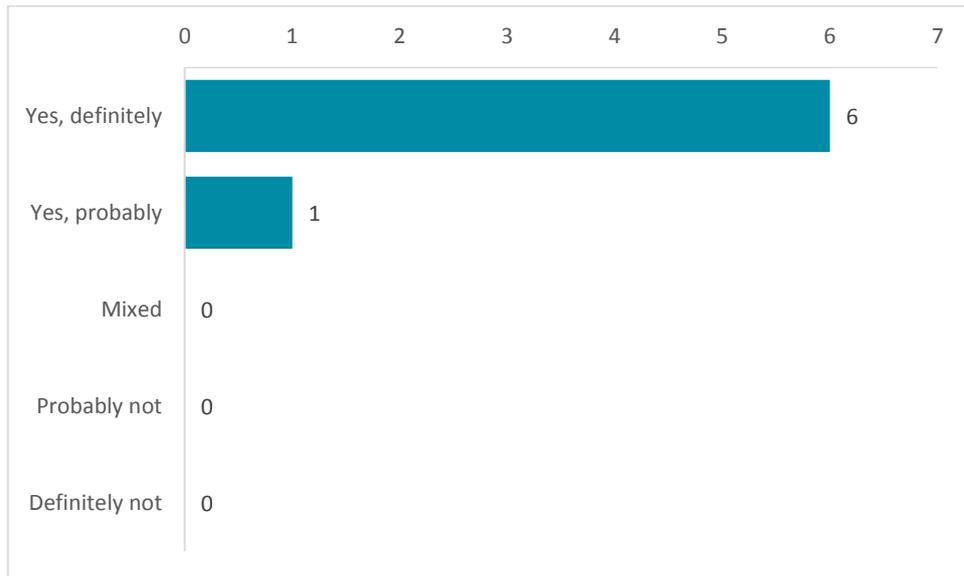
PROCESS

All artists said the creative team worked well together. One felt that they couldn't comment on the whole process.

FIGURE 58: DID THE CREATIVE TEAM WORK WELL TOGETHER?



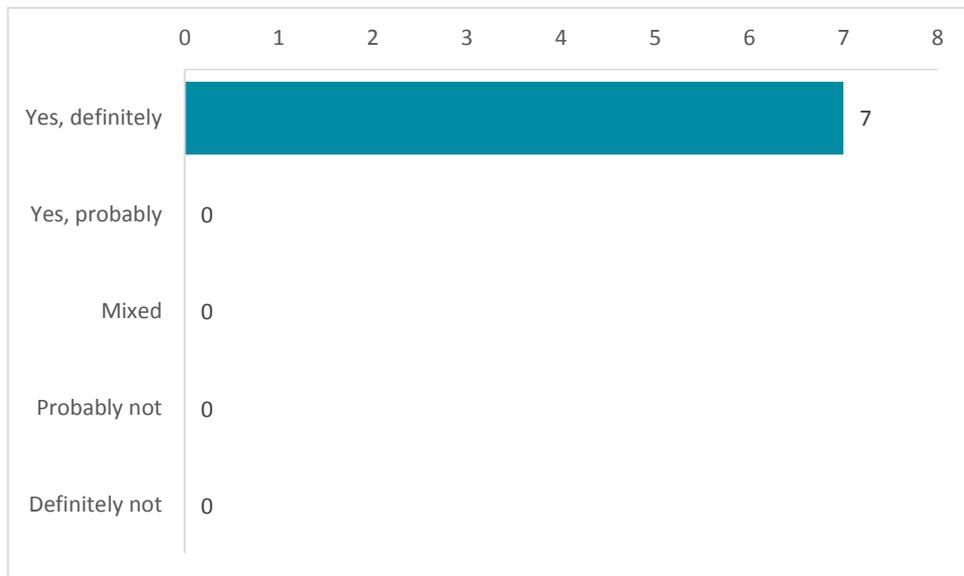
All artists said that the commission brief was clear and attractive. One said there were too many limitations on creativity.

FIGURE 59: WAS THE COMMISSION BRIEF CLEAR AND ATTRACTIVE?

“Stephen had to explain to me slowly and carefully and we got there in the end .”

“Having the narrative structure provided was a very useful dramaturgical jumping off point.”

All artists said communication was appropriate.

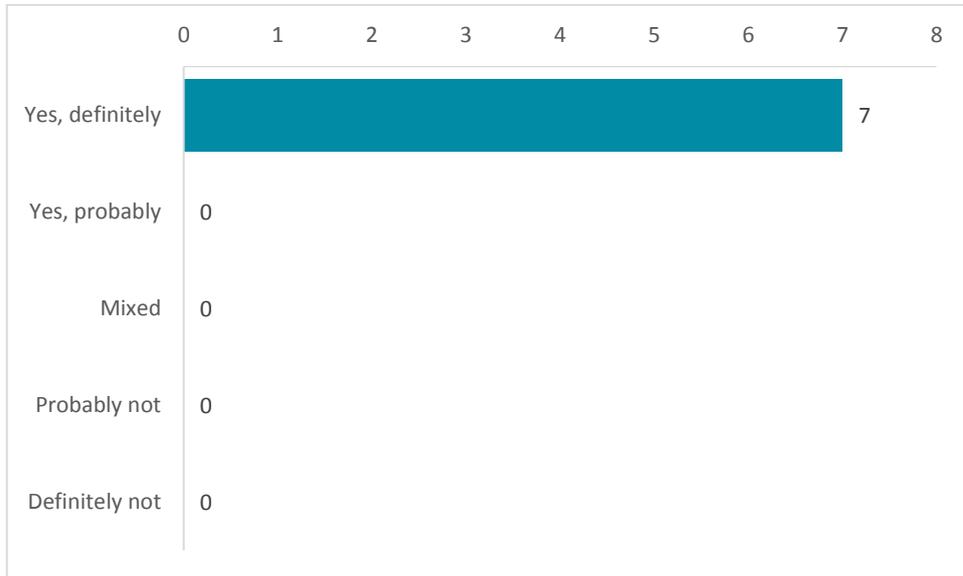
FIGURE 60: WAS COMMUNICATION FROM MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP APPROPRIATE?

“Ally and Kirsten were incredibly communicative and supportive at every step of the process.”

“There was one point when we were emailing back and forth some issues on the piece and then everything fell silent and I got no further responses just at the moment where we were coming to a decision, and the final draft of that music was actually uncommented on - which felt a bit weird at the time.”

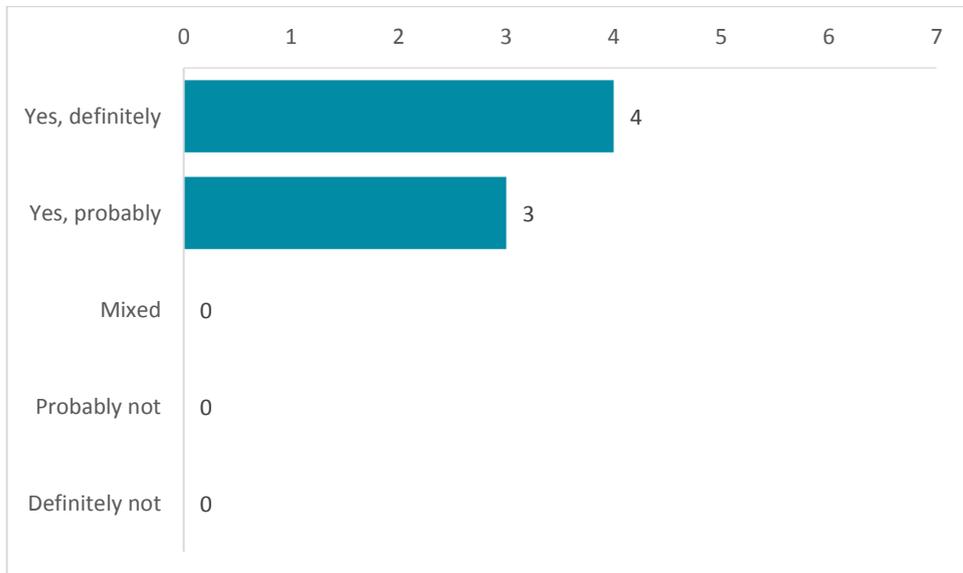
All artists said they got the support they needed.

FIGURE 61: DID YOU GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEEDED FROM MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP?

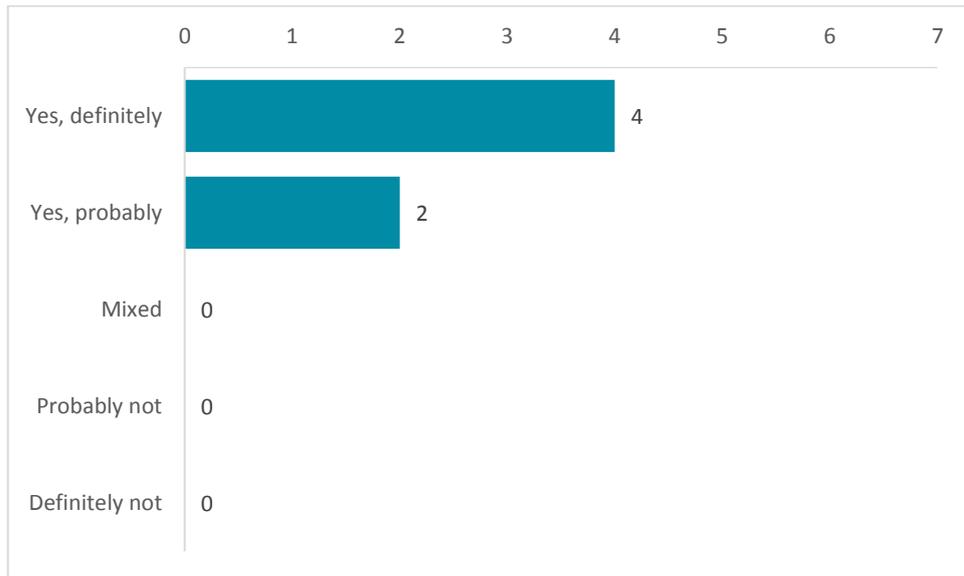


All artists were very satisfied with the contractual arrangements. One pointed out that contract doesn't cover future usage or grand rights.

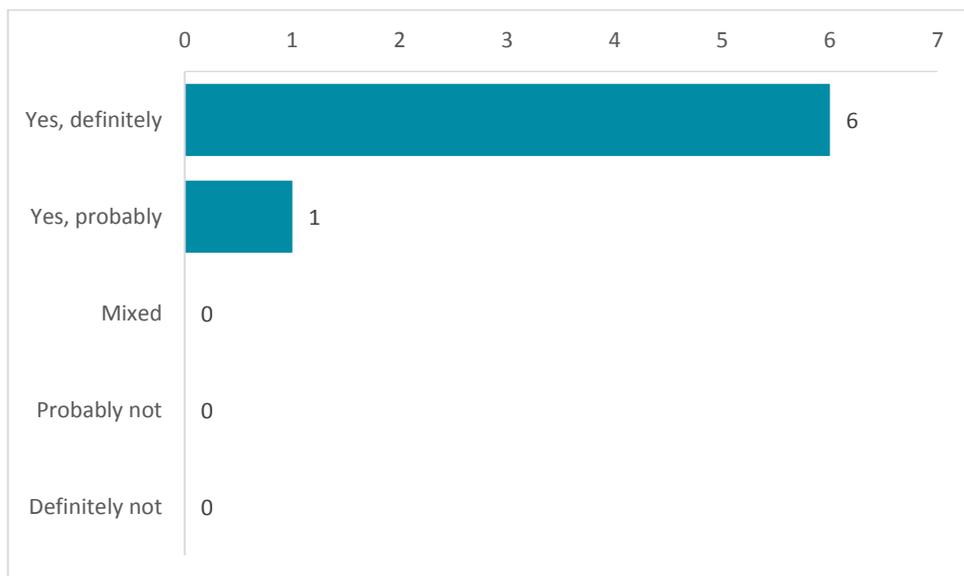
FIGURE 62: WERE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS WITH MAHOGANY OPERA GROUP?



All artists thought the amount of travelling was reasonable.

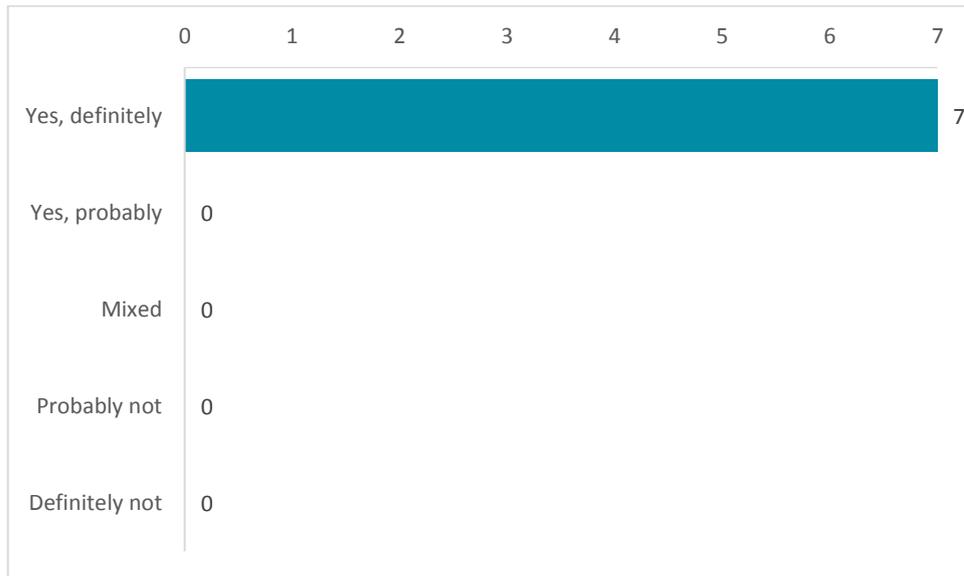
FIGURE 63: WAS THE AMOUNT OF TRAVELLING ON SNAPPY OPERAS REASONABLE?

All artists thought that the Snappy Operas project was well organised.

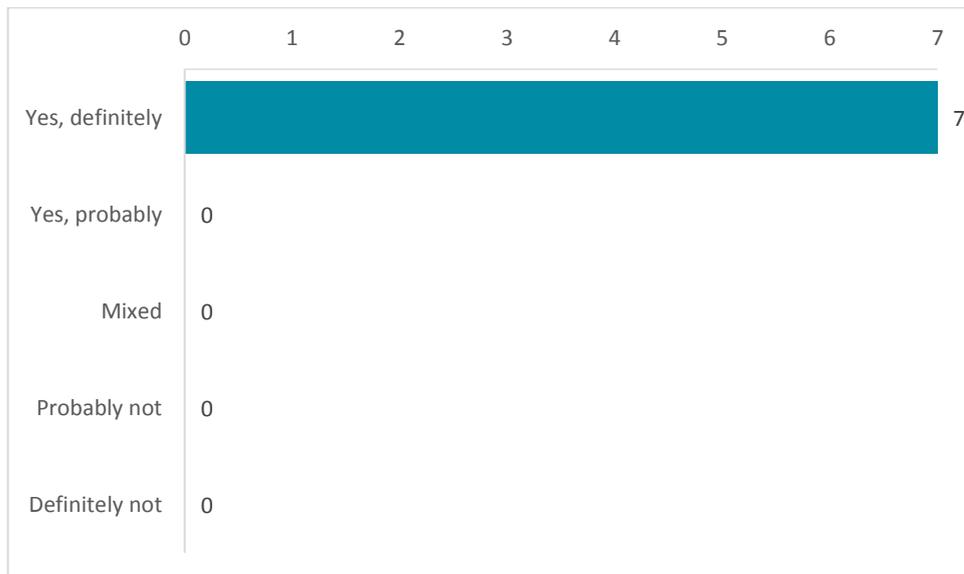
FIGURE 64: OVERALL, WAS SNAPPY OPERAS WELL ORGANISED?

“Organising such a mammoth of a project, with all of the different components and different regions and some performances even occurring simultaneously, I feel that the Snappy Opera Team pulled it off with aplomb.”

All artists said the work was enjoyable.

FIGURE 65: WAS YOUR WORK ON SNAPPY OPERAS ENJOYABLE?

All artists said the R&D sessions were useful. All said that the R&D process changed their commission, in particular using ideas from the children and simplifying the piece.

FIGURE 66: WERE THE R&D SESSIONS USEFUL TO YOU?

“We simplified our story. The R&D process enabled us to try things and to discover that, while particular sections worked in themselves, they didn't necessarily advance the story as we needed in the time available.”

“Contextually, we had done a lot of preparation and thinking around the themes, dramaturgy and lyric and song writing. 50% of prewritten material was not used - as a result of dramaturgical development.”

“We learned what worked with the students.”

“This was definitely a collaborative devising process, with many of the ideas coming out of our R and D sessions with the young people, specifically the character groups - their names, characteristics and behaviour, the setting of the piece (at the bottom of the ocean at the beating heart of the world), and particularly the emotional nuance of the work - the arc from repressed emotion to free expression.”

“Basically running ideas past children is a great way to see what is any good and what is rubbish!”

“I used lyrical and musical ideas from the kids.”

Respondents were asked what advice they would give to another artist working on Snappy Operas. Responses were mainly about collaborating with the students:

- “Keep it simple!”
- “If you're a composer writing both words and music, keep in constant dialogue with the creative team at Mahogany, and consider using and collaborating with a dramturg instead of a writer.”
- “Use the workshops to test as much material as possible.”
- “Prepare as much material in advance of the workshops as you can.”
- “Be open to ideas from both the kids and the creative team in order to get the most from the experience and produce the most effective work... Don't be afraid of the editing shears... And have fun!”
- “Keep it simple and be prepared to be flexible. Overall make the piece compelling in a dramatic way as well as in a musical way.”

Respondents were asked what if anything, is special about Mahogany Opera Group. Responses were:

- “Intensely creative and supportive.”
- “The Snappy Opera idea is itself innovative, accessible and timely.”
- “Sheer scale of ambition, accessibility and reach, fluid and creative interplay between professional commissioned artists and young people.”
- “The unique way they engage students as performers and creators.
- A lovely team of people, dedicated to enjoying opera through participation.”
- “I love the opportunities that they are giving for people outside of the contemporary classical world to engage with this art form, as well as the sense of empowerment that the creative exercises gives to the young people involved, whilst still striving to create works of uncompromising artistic merit and social importance.”
- “They do new opera.”
- “It's a lovely team - I really enjoyed working with you.”

Respondents were asked what, if anything, should be changed about Snappy Operas. Responses were:

- Extend the R&D period.

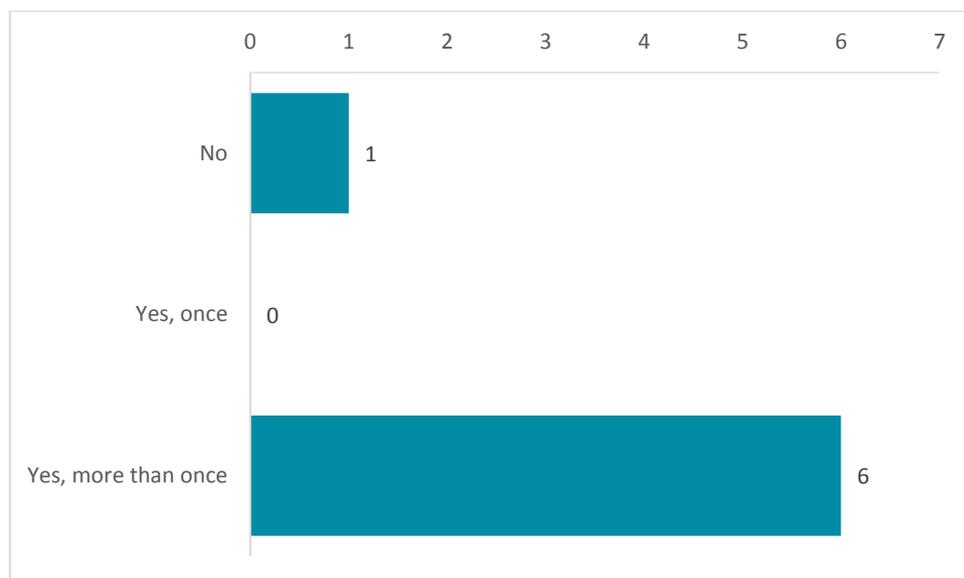
- Strengthen communication between the composers and librettists earlier on in the process to share experiences and ideas that might help inform how each individual work unfolds.

“I know the design and movement needs to be flexible for different schools according to ability/performance space etc. But I think where there are specific movement/dance/staging/dramatic components of the opera it would be good to link these up with the designer, even if just for input and comment to see it can work/how it might work. Very subtle/simple changes to a visual statement can make a huge difference especially where children are involved, yet the visual was basically an add on, but is more key than that.”

OUTCOMES

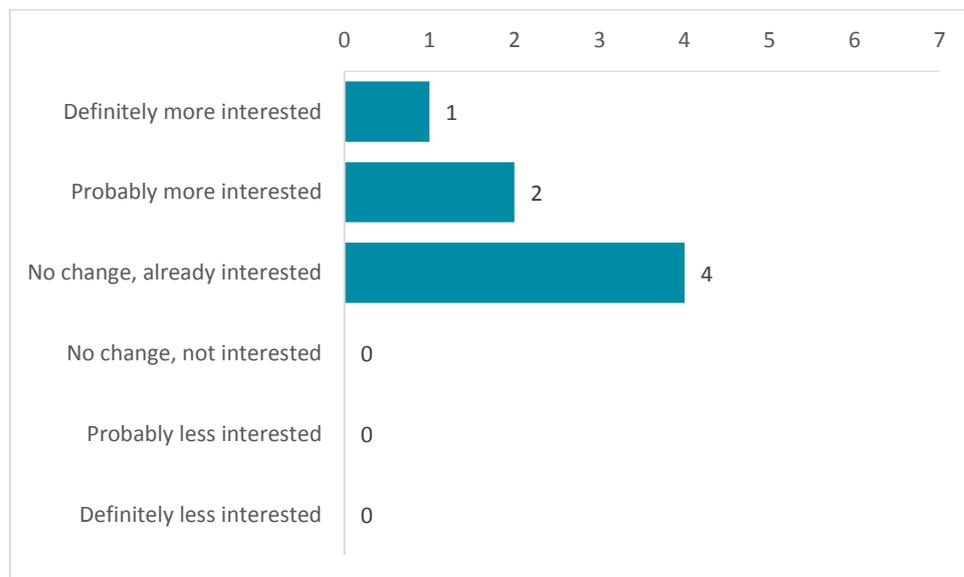
Only one respondent hadn't work with mainstream state schools before.

FIGURE 67: HAD YOU WORKED WITH MAINSTREAM STATE SCHOOLS BEFORE?



Three respondents are now more interested in creating work with participants.

FIGURE 68: AS A RESULT OF WORKING ON SNAPPY OPERAS ARE YOU MORE OR LESS INTERESTED IN CREATING WORK WITH PARTICIPANTS?



“I already make a lot of my work in dialogue with different communities and the rewarding, joyful experience of working in this way on this occasion has consolidated my love for it and belief in the importance of it.”

Respondents were asked whether their work on Snappy Operas give them any insights of value for their participative work. The two comments were:

- Collaboration. “I am used to being the sole leader within the context of creative devising workshops; having the support, energy and input of Freddie and Steven allowed me to take a step back and be an “outside eye” that was really helpful in considering how the ideas would inform the creative output.”
- Planning. “Reinforcement of the importance of quality development phase.”

Respondents were also asked if Snappy Operas gave them any insights of value for their other creative work. Comments were:

- Working with written material. “I gained more experience working with narrated documentary material.”
- Simplifying. “Producing a self-contained work of just 10 minutes that aimed at communicating a fully-formed complex idea was challenging and definitely taught me lessons in editing.”
- Involving performers. “More than ever that it is crucial to develop a new piece with performers. I also learned a lot about what exact features of a score and text comes over from children performing on stage.”
- Narrative. “It was really helpful working with Freddie on story-shape, which is my weak point! That certainly helped in terms of libretto-writing.”

“I have loved working on this project with the whole team, and am excited at the prospect of us potentially working together in the future.”