



**Strategic Conference**  
for  
**Folk / World / Roots in the South East**

22 March 2009  
at The Hawth, Crawley

**Report and Evaluation**

*Penny Allen, SEFAN General Manager*

**Summary**

This was the first dedicated strategic conference for the sector in the South East of England, and was funded by Arts Council, South East.

There were 49 conference delegates, with 19 delegates drawing on the sponsored place fund for equal access. Due to the diverse nature of the sector, the meeting was held on a Sunday in order not to disadvantage the large number of amateur performers, promoters and community groups. The accidental selection of Mothering Sunday, however, resulted in a significant number of potential delegates not attending.

Nevertheless, there was a very strong representation amongst the professional folk/roots promoters and development organisations and a significant number of professional and semi-professional artists. Grass roots and community groups were under-represented.

A very significant number of delegates met each other for the first time at this conference, and it gave delegates a chance to associate a face with a name on the network postings.

No region wide consortium based development programmes were identified by the delegates. Such consortium bids had been one of the expected outcomes of the meeting, but discussions consistently favoured local solutions, with SEFAN focusing on region wide networking and professional development activity.

In fact, a strong and consistent theme running through the discussions was the desire for SEFAN to provide region wide support services and infrastructure, with interested parties 'signing up' to schemes through joining working groups.

Detailed outcomes and requested future developments are itemised in the section on outcomes, and SEFAN will be taking on board these ideas and refocusing away from the proposed large consortium programmes towards its core infrastructure role.

SEFAN received a clear mandate in its role in providing infrastructure and facilitating mutual support.

## Structure and Targets

The period leading up to the conference was one of significant turmoil in the sector due to changes in the ACE RFO (regular funded organisation) portfolio affecting some major SEFAN members (both regionally and nationally), and also as a result of the dramatic economic downturn.

In the period leading up to the conference there were several bilateral meetings between SEFAN and various development organisations. These were with, Music for Change, Making Music, EFDSS and Drum Runners. Other meetings were planned, but did not materialise due to the changes occurring in the sector.

Adam Bushell (ACE supported artist) and Mark Johnson-Brown (lead on the Roots Round About touring network) were co-opted onto the SEFAN board as part of the conference preparation, and the extended board met twice before the conference to work out details of the day.

This was intended as a working meeting for the sector, and no keynote addresses were included to ensure that maximum time was available for productive discussions. Plenty of time was allowed during breaks for individual networking.

The format for the day started with a simple introductory and welcome session, followed by five sessions each focussing on distinct areas of interest, some of which ran in parallel. The day concluded with a plenary session to gather any common threads together and allow for discussion of issues raised in the programme based sessions.

Each session was provided with a facilitator to guide discussions and ensure practical conclusions were reached where possible, a chair to moderate the flow of debate and a note taker to capture the discussions. Flip charts and post-its were also provided for recording inputs. SEFAN also gleaned information on resources and external services that were mentioned in discussions for inclusion in its web resources and for circulation.

By focusing on the sessions as working meetings, it was possible to be responsive to the interests of the participants and to work towards objectives arising out of the discussions. Nevertheless, each session facilitator had a list of potential topics and possible targets. It was intended that each session should result in a consortium to take forward proposals and to build joined-up programmes across the region. These will be taken forward through working groups.

In response to session conclusions, follow-up meetings are being planned for working groups to develop ideas further. These were in areas of professional and personal development for Network members rather than region wide programmes of delivery.

## Session Structure

### 1) *Youth:*

This session discussed ways to involve youth as participants in music, voice and dance and how to help create new groups and opportunities. Participation at all levels up to performance was considered, including encouraging youth to start teaching (alongside a mentor) and organising things themselves.

The session hoped to find ways to construct pathways for progression that could convert a mild diversion into a lifestyle choice.

Supported activities under discussion included...

- Workshops (for all ages and levels up to and including University)
- Schools Projects
- Youth work placements
- Mentoring in performance and teaching
- Youth participation and performance
- Follow on support after outreach projects (“doing it for themselves”)

Facilitator: Anthony Allen

Chair: John Bacon

Notes: Mary Wilson-Jones

### 2) *Healthy Living:*

This is an area where the folk/roots community can consider itself already to be a centre of excellence. Involvement with community groups provides social interaction as well as stress release through singing, storytelling or playing, and physical exercise through dance.

The session sought ways to support the myriad of grass roots groups and clubs that are based around participation, whether it be a choir, band, folk/song club, session, folk orchestra, story telling circle, dance display group or social dance event with live music. Support for new ventures, community events and celebrations of the local heritage or seasonal activity was also on the agenda.

Supported activities under discussion included ...

- Start-up of new groups and endeavours
- Increasing level or quality of activity
- Gatherings and exchange of ideas
- Existing groups/events which need revitalising
- Publicity and outreach
- Teaching and being taught

This session was intended to give an active role to the grass roots community, but the low number of delegates from this part of the sector resulted in discussions moving away from community groups.

Facilitator: Jason Knight

Chair: Anthony Allen

Notes: John Byng

### 3) *Commissioning New Works:*

There is a wealth of creative talent in the SE, and SEFAN is keen to become involved with partner organisations and venues to commission new work.

The session discussed the various ways that commissions can work, and areas for discussion were...

- A scheme for SEFAN + partner to commission new piece each year.
- How can we encourage outside bodies to commission folk/roots new work.
- New pieces as signature for tours.
- New work as part of new cross-artform projects and exhibitions.
- What examples are there we can follow.
- Ways networking can help.
- What can SEFAN do to facilitate collaborations and commissioning.

Facilitator: Jackie Allen

Chair: Adam Bushell

Notes: Mark Johnson-Brown

### 4) *Touring and Audience Development:*

This would be part of SEFAN's activity in supporting talent (both old and new) in the region through a 'top down' approach.

It is possible to support artists at different places in their careers through a diverse touring and audience development programme, and this session was to explore these possibilities.

Activities for discussion included...

- Joint touring programmes with venue partners
- Placing artists in unexpected venues and within cross-artform activities
- An 'opening/support act' scheme to give exposure to lesser known artists
- Enhanced listings services and new forms of advertising
- Whether consortia are going out of favour

Facilitator: Mark Johnson-Brown

Chair: Mary Wilson-Jones

Notes: John Bacon

### *5) Artist Development:*

This session sought input from the artists themselves as to what they would like to see SEFAN doing to help career development.

Activities for discussion included ...

- Advice and hands-on support in writing grant applications.
- Advice on opportunities for personal development.
- Mentoring by other artists.
- Applying for funding on behalf of artist consortia.
- Coordinate funding applications for artists to attend FAE training days.

Facilitator: Adam Bushell

Chair: Anthony Allen

Notes: Jason Knight

### *6) Plenary Session:*

This session was to round up, and identify issues arising from the day. Discussions included online sponsorship for programmes and the Cultural Olympiad.

Facilitator: none

Chair: Anthony Allen

Notes: Mary Wilson-Jones

## Outcomes of the Sessions

Large consortium based programmes could not be identified naturally from discussions, and an alternative paradigm of establishing working groups emerged. In view of the dramatic changes occurring in funding opportunities, this is a natural outcome, and allowed SEFAN to identify schemes that could be of practical benefit to the sector.

Suggestions from delegates for artists and promoters:

- Seek out Cafes and Pubs that host / might be interested in piloting folk nights.
- Use Internet social networking sites to locate like-minded venues/promoters in venue 'friends' lists.
- Don't sell yourself cheap.
- Remember folk is not a 4-letter word.
- Cross advertising between venues helps everybody.

Opportunities and offers:

- Tradamis is looking to expand, and seeks practitioners to be involved. It wants to collaborate on funding applications and projects. It needs expertise in evaluation and skills training facilitation.
- Kent Folk offers assistance with simple web design and pages.
- Creative Partnerships are looking for musicians.

Infrastructure ideas:

- Music library where people can offer their material for use free in schools and youth work. Recorded material in digital format where the artist either owns the copyright or the material is traditional. To be catalogued by <title><subject><brief description>.

Schools resource packs:

- Regional song books should be available from the Sing Britain project, e.g. Music for Change is preparing a Kent song book. However Youth Music's 'Singbook: Twelve Songs Worth Singing' (Faber Music) uses 12 original songs.
- EFDSS Take 6 project is preparing a resource portal for teachers and children covering song collections from London, Hampshire and Lancashire (Official launch 9 June. Down-loadable from <http://library.efdss.org/archives/>).
- Milton Keynes Orchestra (Jackie Allen) can provide a template for schools resource packs to accompany projects to be left behind as resources for continuity.
- London Schools Arts Service has useful resources, [www.lonsas.org.uk](http://www.lonsas.org.uk).

Case Studies:

- SEFAN would like to link to case studies for projects to encourage wider understanding of the sector and engagement with it. Please submit suitable case study links ([admin@sefan.org.uk](mailto:admin@sefan.org.uk)).

Take Note:

- Promoters, clubs and festivals, be aware that International Work Permits have changed this year. Artists entering the country must have the correct permit on arrival to get past immigration.
- SEFAN is always willing to work in partnership with Network members on grant applications, and its Charitable Status allows it to apply to sources (and manage the funds) not accessible to members on their own.

Youth Engagement

- Success breeds success, youth participants are the key to engaging more youth involvement.
- Viral advertising is the most effective means of reaching the young.
- There is a gap in provision of 'central events' to get the young linked together.
- The sector does not have the resource to engage directly with the young across the region, the young must be involved in this work themselves.

- Free and heavy discount schemes are important, and a 'recent graduate' discount (while paying off student loans) may also be needed to cover the last link to retain interest of maturing youth.
- The idea of a mini-conference for folk educators was floated by the EFDSS and generally welcomed.
- Folk/Roots Artists need training to teach as well as qualified teachers need training in traditions.
- There is a role for SEFAN to improve visibility of resources available to teachers and students.
- End of project reports and case studies could be sent to SEFAN to be added to the resources available. These could include feedback on what worked and what did not. These could help roll out successful projects elsewhere in the region.
- Pathways for progression are essential, but can only realistically be supported through information services in the present economic climate.

#### External Links

- 'Extended Schools' extracurricular development, teacher resource site: <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools/>
- London Schools Arts Service, [www.lonsas.org.uk](http://www.lonsas.org.uk)
- Government support for links between creative professionals and schools. Also sign up to their email bulletins. <http://www.creative-partnerships.com/>
- Youth Dance England supports youth getting involved in dance, <http://www.yde.org.uk>
- Continuing Professional Development offered by Creative Capital in London.

## Future Work and Actions

The following Task Groups are to be established during the coming year, and anybody interested in joining one of them is encouraged to contact SEFAN.

- **Teacher Briefing Pack** (To provide a template)
  - Jason Knight
  - Mike Ruff
  - Jackie Allen
  
- **Online Library** (of music and songs that could be used by schools and other projects as a free resource)
  - Martin Jeramiah
  - Anthony Allen
  
- **Corporate package** (to put together a menu of activities that could be offered to the corporate sector)
  - Mike Courthold
  - Mike Ruff
  - Bob Adams
  
- **Educational Engagement Web** (web resources to encourage FE and HE students and colleges to engage directly with community groups, and to see them as a study resource)
  - Keith Trampleasure
  - Anthony Allen
  - Beau Webber
  
- **Grey Project** (Concertina Trust, applications reviewed 30 Jun, 31 Oct 09)
  - Kate Holland
  - Mike Ruff
  - Alexander Percy
  
- **Local Area meetings** (Local networking meetings)
  - Beau Webber (Kent)
  - Adam Bushell (Sussex)
  
- **Web, new technology & Viral Advertising** (Youtube, Friends Reunited [has a folk section], Twitter, Spotify etc. Text and email lists and online donations page for specific programmes. Investigate Big Give web portal)
  - Beau Webber
  - Anthony Allen
  
- **2012 Cultural Olympiad** (Possible SEFAN branded week of activity targeted at the young under the Cultural Olympiad. Note that commercial sponsors cannot use the Olympic logo, so funding must be from public money and trusts. Music for Change has a pilot project, *Pulse*)
  - Martin Jeramiah
  - TBD

- **Mentoring scheme** (both 1-2-1 and group sessions can be useful)
  - (Mike Ruff, Brian Heywood offered mentoring)
  - (Kate Holland, Alexander Percy, Simon Hopper, Brian Heywood requested mentoring)
    - Roger Watson
    - Simon Hopper
    - Brian Heywood

In addition to the working groups SEFAN itself has been tasked with investigating the following projects...

- **Commissions.** Establish a scheme to commission a new piece of work each year in partnership with a venue or event. The partner and artists are to change each year.
- **Ethnicity and inclusivity.** The conference delegates were aware of the need to remain vigilant in ensuring these words are part of the sector's brief. SEFAN will play a pivotal role in this.
- **Discussion Forums.** Investigate setting up online discussion forums in topics of interest to the members to allow them to interact directly.
- **Youth Events.** Investigate ways to encourage 'central events' to get the young linked together.
- **Teacher and Student Resources.** There is a role for SEFAN to improve visibility of resources available to teachers and students. The provision of online resources and templates are needed for the professionals in the sector, while the grass roots community can be presented as resource material for student projects to encourage direct engagement with the amateur community.

Subsequent to the conference, follow up meetings have been held with Tom Fairbairn (ex TAPS) and Asha, and other meetings and local forums are in planning. As a result of the conference discussions, SEFAN submitted a joint funding proposal (written and to be delivered by Asha with SEFAN financial administration) to MK Community Foundation which has been approved. Other similar collaborations with Network members are welcomed.

Approved by the conference Facilitators:

Adam Bushell

Anthony Allen

Mark Johnson-Brown

Jason Knight

Jackie Allen