

# Findings from the 2020 Morris Census

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## Summary

### Key facts

- The number of morris dancers in the UK has continued to grow, from 12,800 in 2014 to 13,600 in 2020.
- Seven out of ten morris dancers are aged 50 or over and just one in ten are aged under 30. The average age of a UK morris dancer is 55, up from 52 in 2014.
- Morris has reached gender balance. The 2018 amendment to the Morris Ring constitution allowing sides with female dancers to be members has led to a quarter of Ring sides having opened their membership fully to both sexes since then.
- Less than one per cent of UK morris dancers are of non-white ethnicity.
- UK morris sides recruited around 2,200 new dancers in the past two years. New recruits are, on average, age 45 and are 63 per cent female. A third of new recruits to Morris Ring sides were female.
- The proportion of sides that dance Cotswold has been falling over the past six years, while the proportion dancing Border and Rapper has risen.
- The proportion of sides that place importance on preserving tradition has fallen from 47 per cent in 2014 to 40 per cent in 2020.

### Conclusions

The number of morris dancers in the UK continues to grow in spite of some signs of decline; not least a relatively old and ageing membership. Morris is also undergoing considerable demographic and stylistic change, albeit slowly.

Morris has reached gender balance and is likely to be majority-female in the future. The 2018 amendment to the Morris Ring constitution allowing sides with female dancers to be members is part of this story but the trends in recruitment and side formation and dissolution have been leading morris towards being majority female over the longer term anyway. However, more generally morris is unrepresentative of the population by age and ethnicity.

Stylistically, morris is becoming more diverse and less traditional. Cotswold is in relative decline, while Border and Rapper are growing. The proportion of sides that place importance on preserving tradition has also fallen steadily over time.

The difference in the characteristics of sides that are optimistic about continuing in the future and those that are not further underline these trends. Sides that are not optimistic are more male, more likely to be members of the Morris Ring, more likely to perform Cotswold, Molly, Mumming and North West and more likely to place important on preserving tradition. In contrast, sides that are optimistic about the future are more female, more likely to be in the Morris Federation or Open Morris, dance Border or Rapper and place less importance on preserving tradition.

# 1 Introduction

The Morris Census is an online survey designed to collect information from all morris sides in the UK and around the world to describe morris dancing in the 21st century. The main aim of the research is to inform the morris community and the wider public about morris dancing and the opportunities and challenges it faces.

The survey was previously conducted in 2014 and 2017. The 2014 survey received responses from 480 UK sides out of an estimated 753 active sides at the time, a response rate of 64 per cent. The second survey in 2017 received responses from 527 UK sides out of an estimated 768, a response rate of 69 per cent. The third survey was conducted in summer 2020 and received responses from 569 UK sides out of an estimated total of 812, a response rate of 70 per cent. The resulting survey data is statistically weighted according to member organisation and dance style, so it is nationally representative of UK sides.

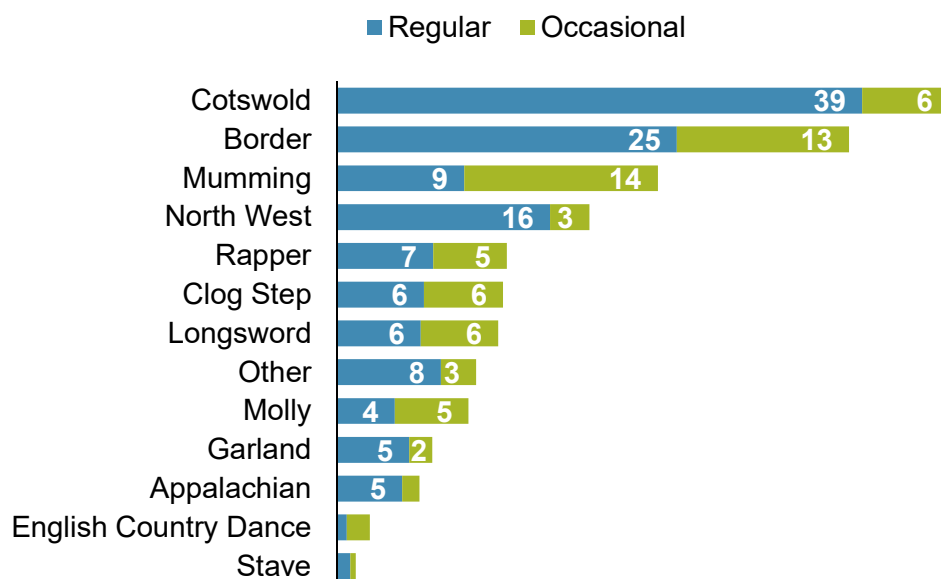
The Morris Census has received support from the Morris Federation, Morris Ring and Open Morris through the Joint Morris Organisation. Many thanks to the group of contributors who helped to design the survey, distribute it to member sides and encouraged sides to complete it.

## 2 Side characteristics

The Morris Federation is the largest of the three main UK morris organisations, by number of UK-based sides, with 64 per cent. The Morris Ring is the second-largest with 19 per cent, but this share has fallen from 23 per cent in 2014. Open Morris is the third largest with 17 per cent of sides in the UK.

As shown in Figure 1, Cotswold is the most-commonly performed dance style by sides in the UK. Around four in ten (39 per cent) sides dance Cotswold regularly, with a further six per cent dancing Cotswold occasionally. Border is the second-most common with a quarter dancing it regularly and another 13 per cent occasionally.

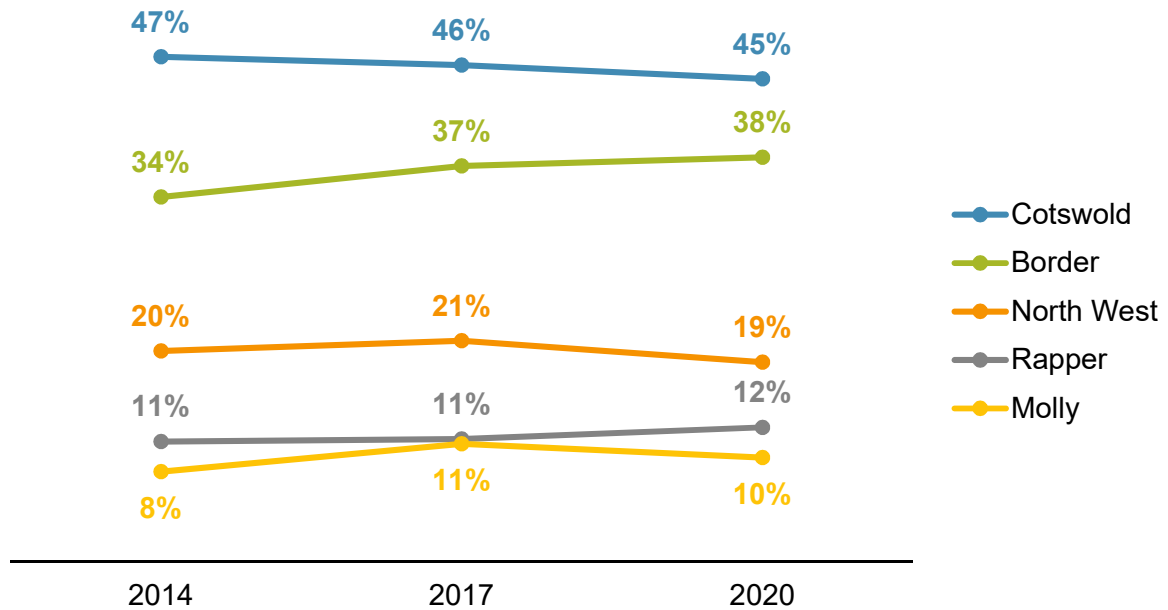
**Figure 1 Cotswold is the most-commonly danced style**



Note: totals do not sum to 100 per cent as sides could select more than one response.

Figure 2 shows that the share of UK sides that perform each style has changed over time. The proportion of sides that dance Cotswold morris (either regularly or occasionally) has fallen slightly between 2014 and 2020, from 47 to 45 per cent. At the same time the proportion of sides that dance Border morris has increased from 34 per cent in 2014 to 38 per cent in 2020. Other styles have seen less marked changes over time, with North West falling slightly from 21 per cent in 2017 to 19 per cent in 2020 and Rapper increasing from 11 per cent in 2014 to 12 per cent in 2020.

**Figure 2 The share of UK sides dancing Border has increased between 2014 and 2020**



Note: totals do not sum to 100 per cent as sides could select more than one response.

### 3 Members and their characteristics

#### Number of side members

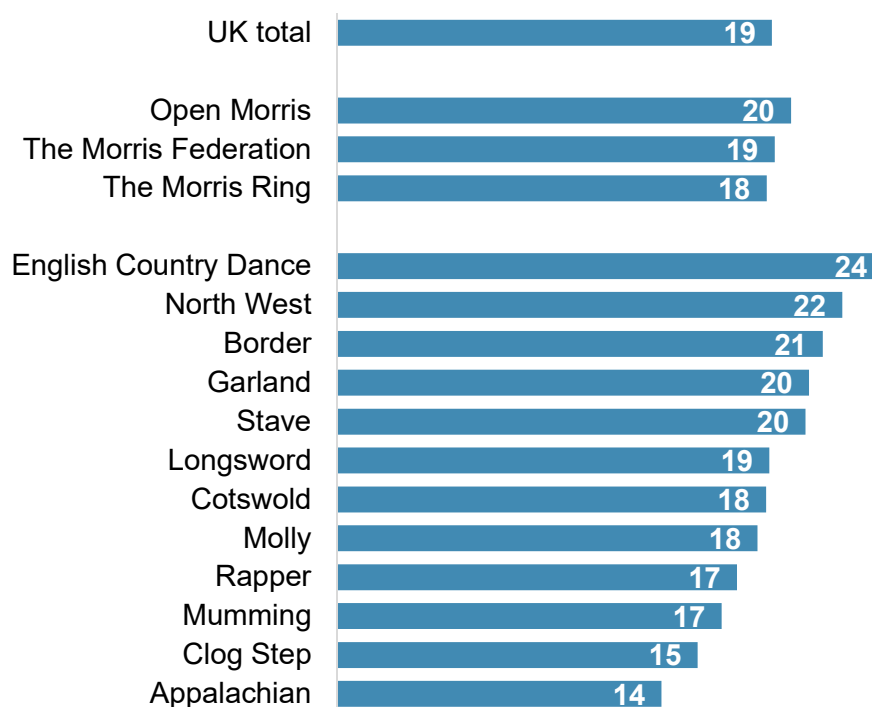
The survey asked several questions about the number of members in each side and their characteristics. The definition of members provided was ‘musicians and dancers/ performers that regularly perform out with the side’.

Figure 3 shows that UK sides have an average of 19 members. Open Morris sides have a slightly higher average number of members per side (20) while Morris Ring sides have a slightly lower average (18). The average number of members per side in Open Morris has risen from 19 in 2014 to 20 in 2020, and the average in the Morris Federation has risen from 18 in 2014 to 19 in 2020. The average number of members per side among Morris Ring sides has fallen from 20 in 2014 to 18 in 2020.

Sides that perform North West, Border and Garland regularly have higher than average numbers of members per side, perhaps reflective of the larger sets in which these dances are performed. In contrast, Appalachian, Clog Step and Rapper sides tend to have fewer members than average, perhaps reflective of the smaller sets in which these dances are performed.

After adjusting the average number of members per side, to account for those who are members of more than one side, and multiplying by the total number of UK sides, there are an estimated 13,600 morris dancers in the UK. Due primarily to increases in the number of sides, the total number of morris dancers has increased from 12,800 in 2014 and 13,000 in 2017. The number of morris dancers in the UK has continued to grow over the last six years.

**Figure 3 UK sides have an average of 19 members**



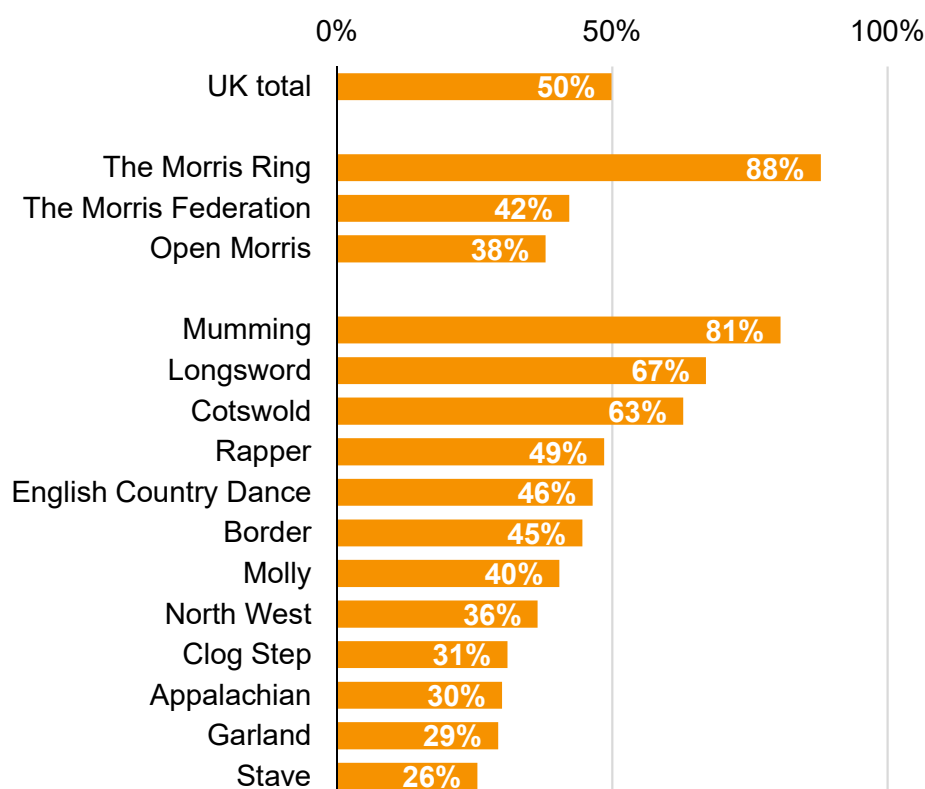
## Gender

The Morris Census survey questions about the gender of side members were tweaked in 2020 to include the number of 'non-binary / other' members in addition to male and female. This option was requested by a number of sides in feedback to previous surveys. On average, 0.5 per cent of UK sides' members (an estimated 60-80) are reported to be of non-binary gender.

Overall, the proportion of morris dancers that are male (and the proportion that are female) has remained at 50 per cent in 2020, as it was in 2017.

Figure 4 shows that the gender balance of members varies considerably by organisation and style. The gender balance is majority male in Mumming, Longsword and Cotswold. In contrast, Garland, Appalachian, Clog step, North West, Molly and Border sides are majority female.

**Figure 4 Gender balance varies considerably by organisation and style**



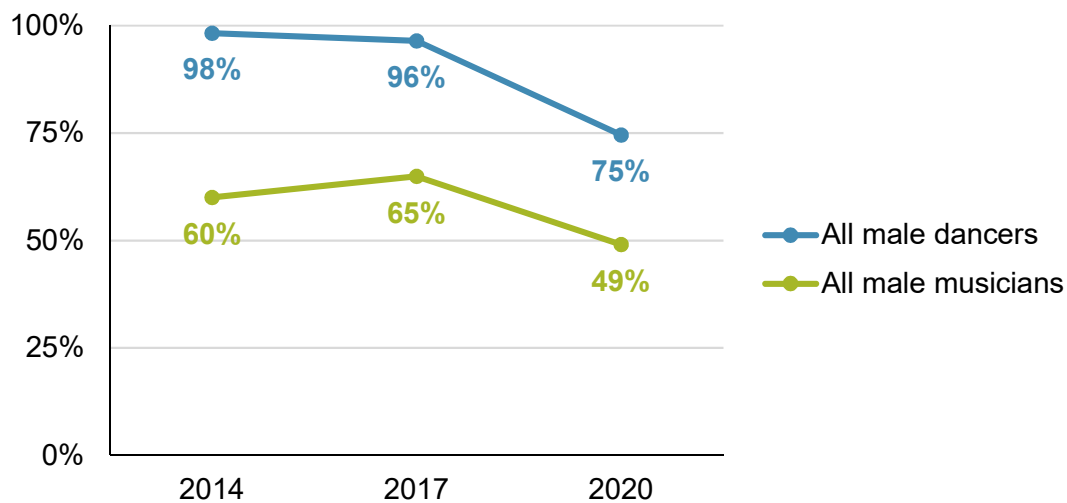
The proportion of side members who are male is 88 per cent among sides in the Morris Ring, compared to 42 per cent among sides in the Morris Federation and 38 per cent among Open Morris sides. However, the proportion of side members who are male among sides in the Morris Ring has fallen from 97 per cent in 2014 to 93 per cent in 2017 and 88 per cent in 2020.

The Morris Ring constitution was amended in 2011 to allow member sides to have female musicians and again in 2018 to allow sides with female dancers to be members. Figure 5 shows that this constitutional change has prompted a large number of sides in the Morris Ring to change their side's rules on the gender of members. The proportion of sides with all-male dancers in the Morris Ring has fallen from 96 per cent in 2017 to 75 per cent (all of the remainder are 'mixed sex/ gender neutral'). The proportion of Morris Ring sides with all-male

musicians has also fallen between 2014 and 2020, from 60 per cent to 49 per cent. Overall, 35 per cent of Morris Ring sides have made some form of change to their rules on the gender of members.

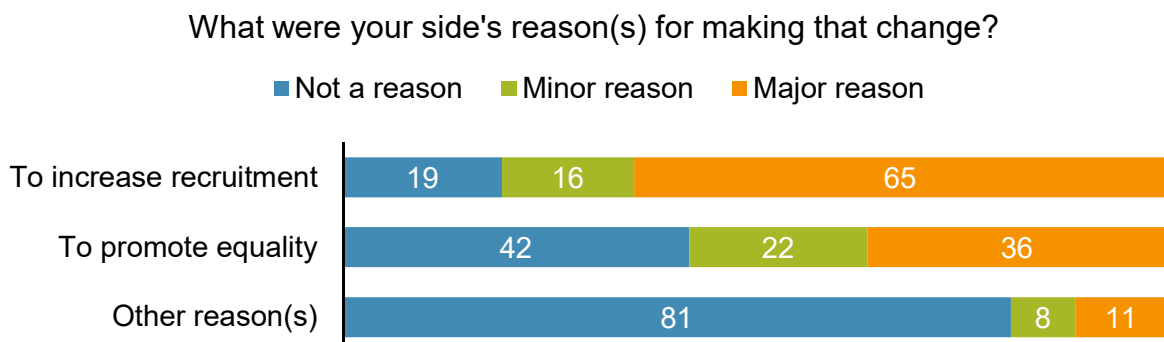
More generally, 15 per cent of current UK sides report having, at some point, changed their rules on the gender of either dancers, musicians or both, including ten per cent of sides in the Morris Federation and 11 per cent of Open Morris sides. Around a third (36 per cent) of those sides who have made a change reported doing so in the past three years and more than half (56 per cent) reported doing so in the past five years.

**Figure 5 A notable minority of Morris Ring sides have changed their rules on the gender of members since the organisation’s constitution was amended**



Sides who had made a change to their rules on the gender of members were asked the reasons why they made the most recent change. Figure 6 shows that the main reason, cited by 65 per cent of sides that had made a change as a ‘major reason’ and 16 per cent as a ‘minor reason’, was ‘to increase recruitment’. Around a third of sides (36 per cent) said that a ‘major reason’ for making the change was ‘to promote equality’, and 22 per cent cited this as a ‘minor reason’. Only 19 per cent of sides cited other reasons, the most commonly cited of which was accommodating the inclusion of someone of the opposite sex who had asked to join.

**Figure 6 Increasing recruitment was the main reason sides cited for changing their rules on the gender of members**



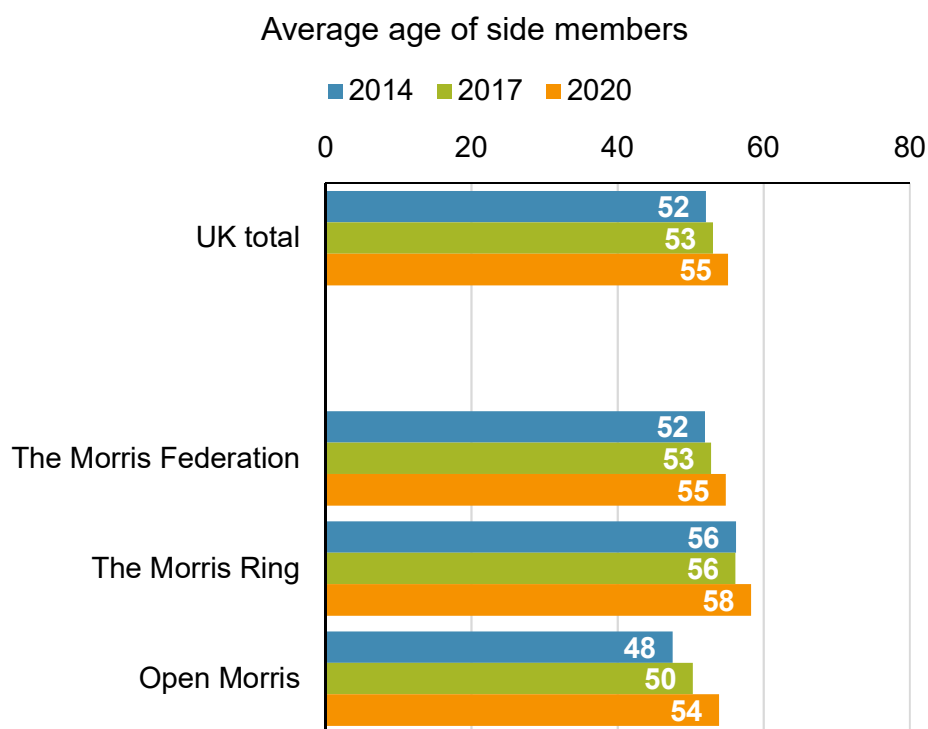
## Age

The age distribution of UK morris dancers is skewed towards older age groups. More than two-thirds (70 per cent) of UK morris dancers are aged 50 or over and just over half (51 per cent) are aged 60 or over. In contrast, just ten per cent of UK morris dancers are aged under 30.

The age distribution has been shifting further towards older age groups over time, as shown by three waves of the Morris Census survey. The proportion of morris dancers aged 50 or over has risen from 66 per cent in 2014 and 2017, to 70 per cent in 2020. The proportion of morris dancers aged under 30 has fallen from 13 per cent in 2014 to 12 per cent in 2017 and ten per cent in 2020.

The average age of morris dancers has risen over time from an estimated 52 in 2014 to 53 in 2017 and 55 in 2020. Figure 7 shows that the average age of morris dancers is above 50 in all three main UK morris organisations. The average age in each of the three organisations has risen since 2014, by three years in the Morris Federation, two years in the Morris Ring and six years among members of sides in Open Morris.

**Figure 7 The average age of UK morris dancers has risen between 2014 and 2020 in all three morris organisations**





## Ethnicity

The proportion of UK morris dancers from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) (i.e. non-white) background is 0.8 per cent. This has increased very slightly since 2017 from 0.7 per cent. This represents an estimated increase from around 100 individuals in 2017 to around 110 in 2020.

The proportion of BAME morris dancers is considerably lower than the 14 per cent of the UK general population who are from a BAME background. Some of this disparity, but by no means all, could be accounted for by the age distribution of morris dancers: six per cent of those aged over 50 in the UK population are from a BAME background, considerably more than among morris dancers.

The proportion of BAME morris dancers varies by organisation, from 1.3 per cent of members of Open Morris sides to 0.3 per cent of members of Morris Ring sides. The proportion of BAME members is 0.6 per cent among sides in the Morris Federation.

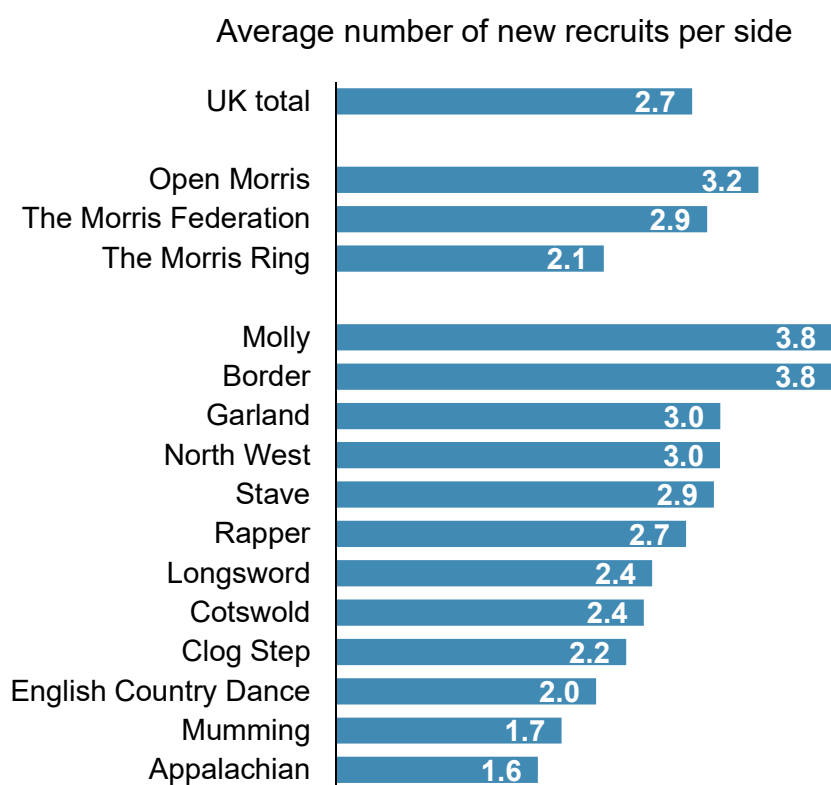
## 4 Recruitment

### Number of recruits

The survey asked several questions about the number of new recruits each side had had join in the past two years and their characteristics. The definition of recruits provided was 'those that were new to morris dancing, and are still active in the side'.

Figure 8 shows that UK sides have had an average of 2.7 new recruits join their sides in the past two years, which equates to around 2,200 new members nationally. The numbers of new recruits varies considerably between sides in different organisations and of different dance styles. Sides in Open Morris had the highest average number of recruits per side, with 3.2, while sides in the Morris Ring had an average of 2.1 new recruits per side. Despite having the lowest average numbers of new recruits, the number of recruits per side in the Morris Ring has risen from 1.8 in 2014 and 2017.

**Figure 8 Molly and Border sides have the highest numbers of recruits per side**



Molly and Border sides had the highest average number of new recruits per side, with 3.8 and North West and Garland sides had higher-than-average recruitment with three new members per side. Clog step and Appalachian sides had lower-than-average numbers of recruits per side, but also tend to have fewer members overall.

### Gender of recruits

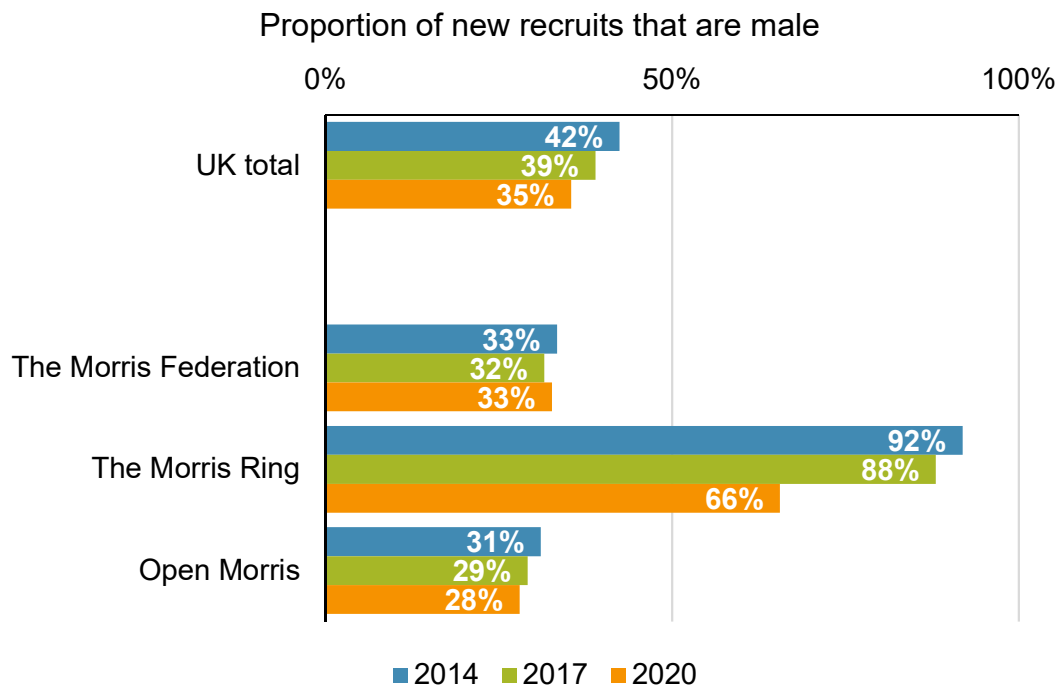
New recruits are considerably more likely to be female than to be male. In 2020, only around a third (35 per cent) of new recruits were male and 63 per cent were female. Around one per cent were 'non-binary/ other'. Mumming was the only style to have a male majority of new recruits. All other styles had a majority of female recruits, ranging from 44 per cent male in

Longsword sides and 42 per cent in Cotswold sides, to 14 per cent male in Clog step sides and 16 per cent in Garland sides.

As shown in Figure 9, the gender balance of recruits in UK sides has been towards women in all three Morris Census surveys since 2014. The extent of the female majority of recruits has changed over the intervening years, across all three morris organisations. Overall, the proportion of recruits that are male has fallen from 42 per cent in 2014 to 35 per cent in 2020. The proportion has been stable within sides in the Morris Federation, while the proportion in the Open Morris have seen the proportion fall from 31 per cent to 28 per cent.

The most considerable change has been the proportion of new recruits that are male in the Morris Ring. The proportion has fallen from 92 per cent in 2014 to 66 per cent in 2020. This is likely to be related to the 2018 amendment to the Morris Ring constitution, allowing sides with female dancers to be members. The change may also be a factor in the number of recruits per side in the Morris Ring having risen from 1.8 in 2017 to 2.1 in 2020.

**Figure 9 The proportion of recruits that are male has been shrinking**



### Age of recruits

Recruits tend to be younger than the average side member, but not considerably. Figure 10 shows that the average age of a new recruit is 45. Just under half (45 per cent) of new recruits are aged 50 or over, while only 21 per cent are aged under 30.

As also shown in Figure 10, the average age of new recruits has risen from 41 in 2014 to 45 in 2020. This has been the case across all three morris organisations: the average age of recruits has risen by four years among sides in the Morris Federation, by five years among sides in the Morris Ring and seven years among Open Morris sides.

**Figure 10 The average age of new recruits has been steadily rising**

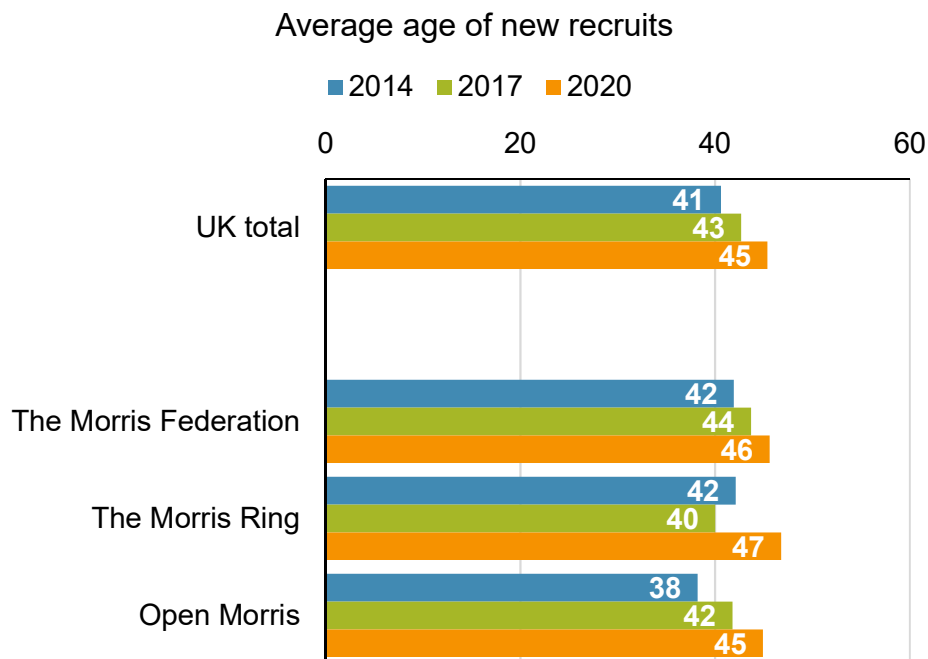
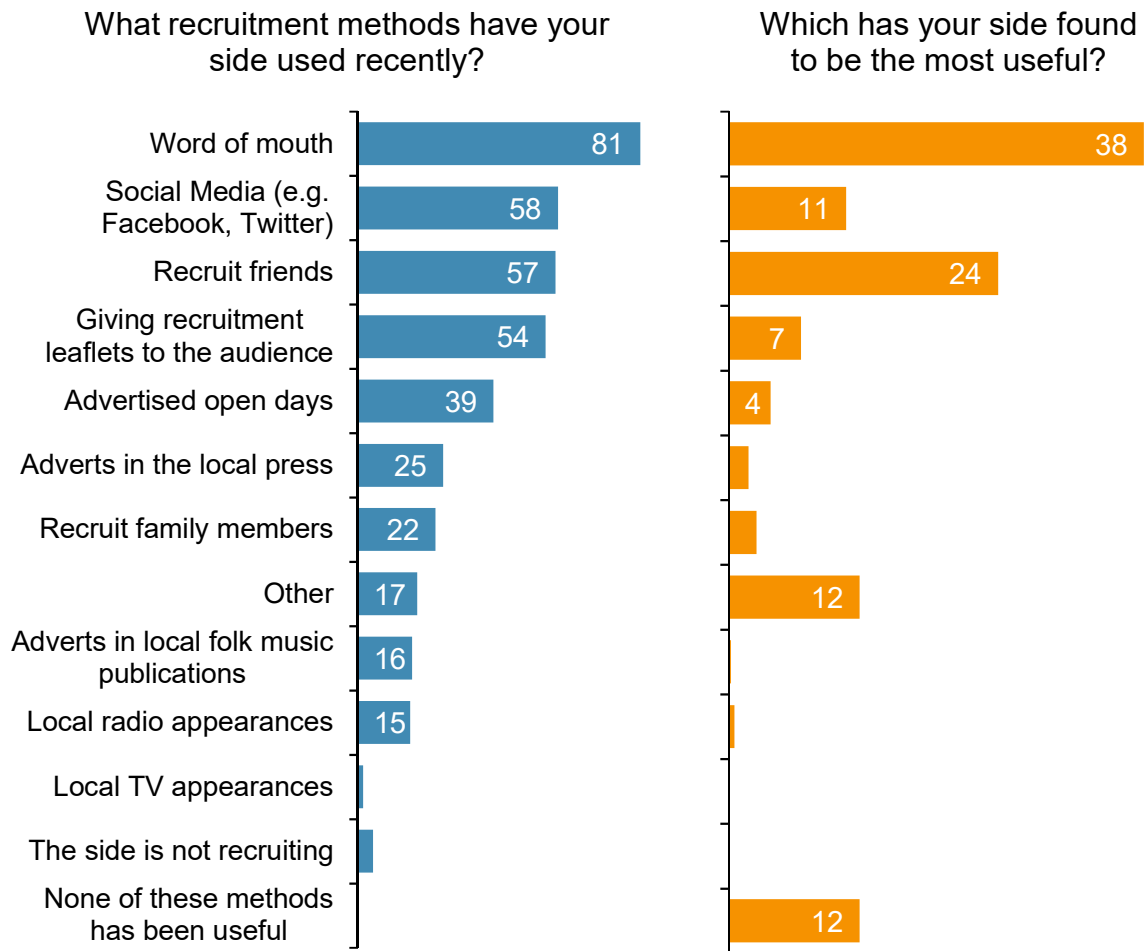


Figure 11 shows that UK morris sides use a range of different methods for recruiting new members. The most commonly used recruitment methods are word of mouth (81 per cent), social media (58 per cent), recruiting friends (57 per cent) and giving leaflets to the audience when performing (54 per cent). These are the most active and direct forms of recruitment, which target people that are most likely to already have an interest in morris to encourage them.

More passive indirect forms of communication that tend to be focussed at a larger and broader audience, such as local TV or radio, tend to be less favoured by sides but are used by some. Around a fifth of sides (22 per cent) use some form of family recruitment, whether it is siblings or children, but much less than friends.

The recruitment methods sides cite as being the most useful are the active methods that have a personal touch (word of mouth, recruiting friends and using social media) whereas passive and indirect methods such as adverts in local publications are considered to be less useful. Only four per cent of sides find that advertised open days are the most useful method.

**Figure 11 Word of mouth is the most used, and most useful, method of recruitment**



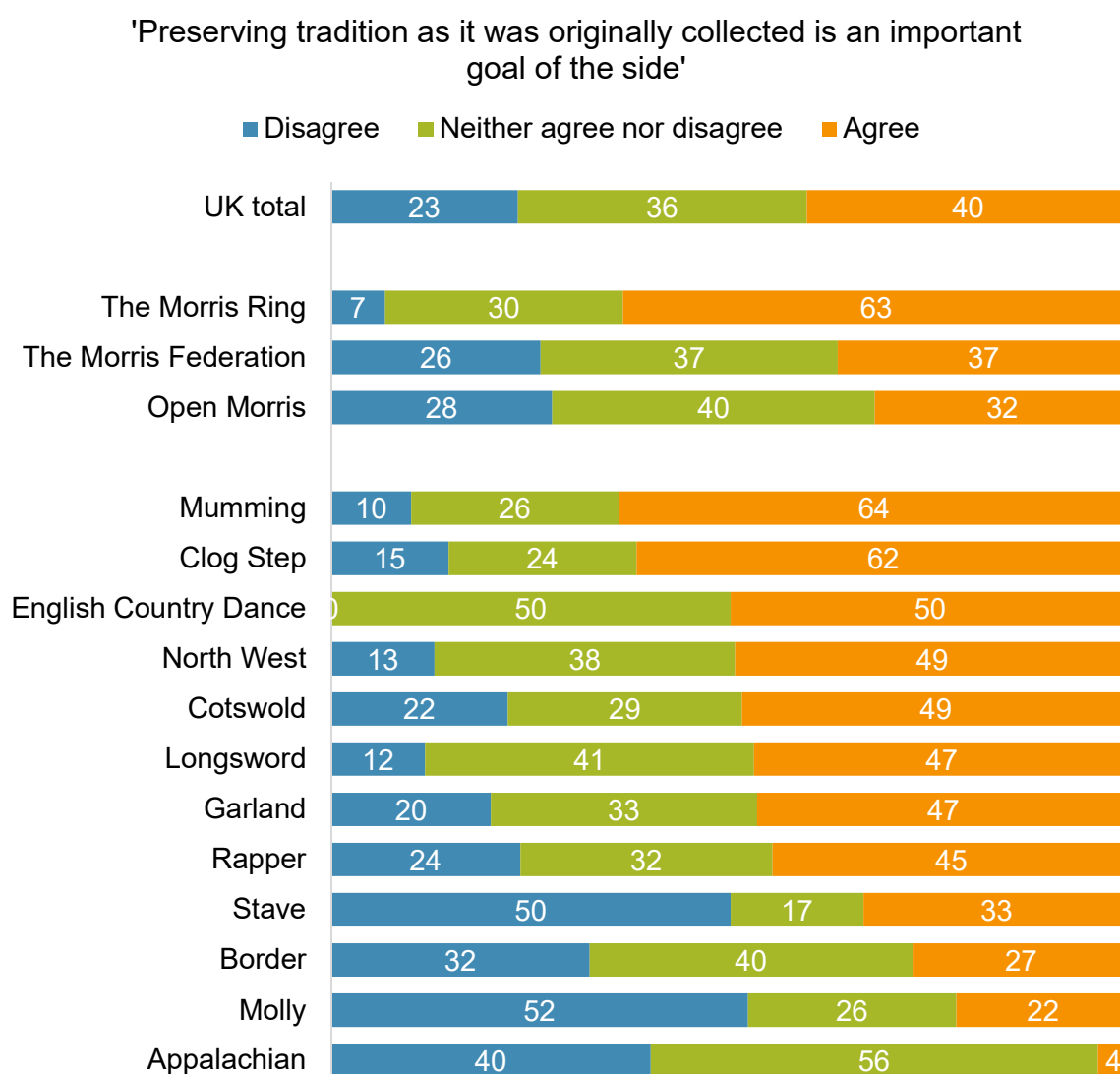
## 5 The importance of preserving tradition

Sides were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement: 'preserving the tradition as it was originally collected is an important goal of the side'. Figure 12 shows that opinions on the importance of preserving tradition vary considerably between sides, with 40 per cent agreeing, 23 per cent disagreeing and 36 per cent neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Sides in the Morris Ring place greater importance on preserving tradition, with 63 per cent agreeing with the statement and only seven per cent disagreeing. Mumming and clog step sides also place a high importance on preserving tradition. In contrast, Border, Molly and Appalachian sides place the least importance on preserving tradition.

The importance placed on preserving tradition has also fallen slightly over time. The proportion agreeing that preserving tradition is an important goal of the side has fallen from 47 per cent in 2014 to 40 per cent in 2020. The proportion agreeing with the statement has fallen most in the Morris Ring, where it has fallen from 75 per cent of sides to 63 per cent. The proportion has fallen by two and three percentage points respectively in the Morris Federation and Open Morris.

**Figure 12 The importance of preserving tradition varies considerably between sides**



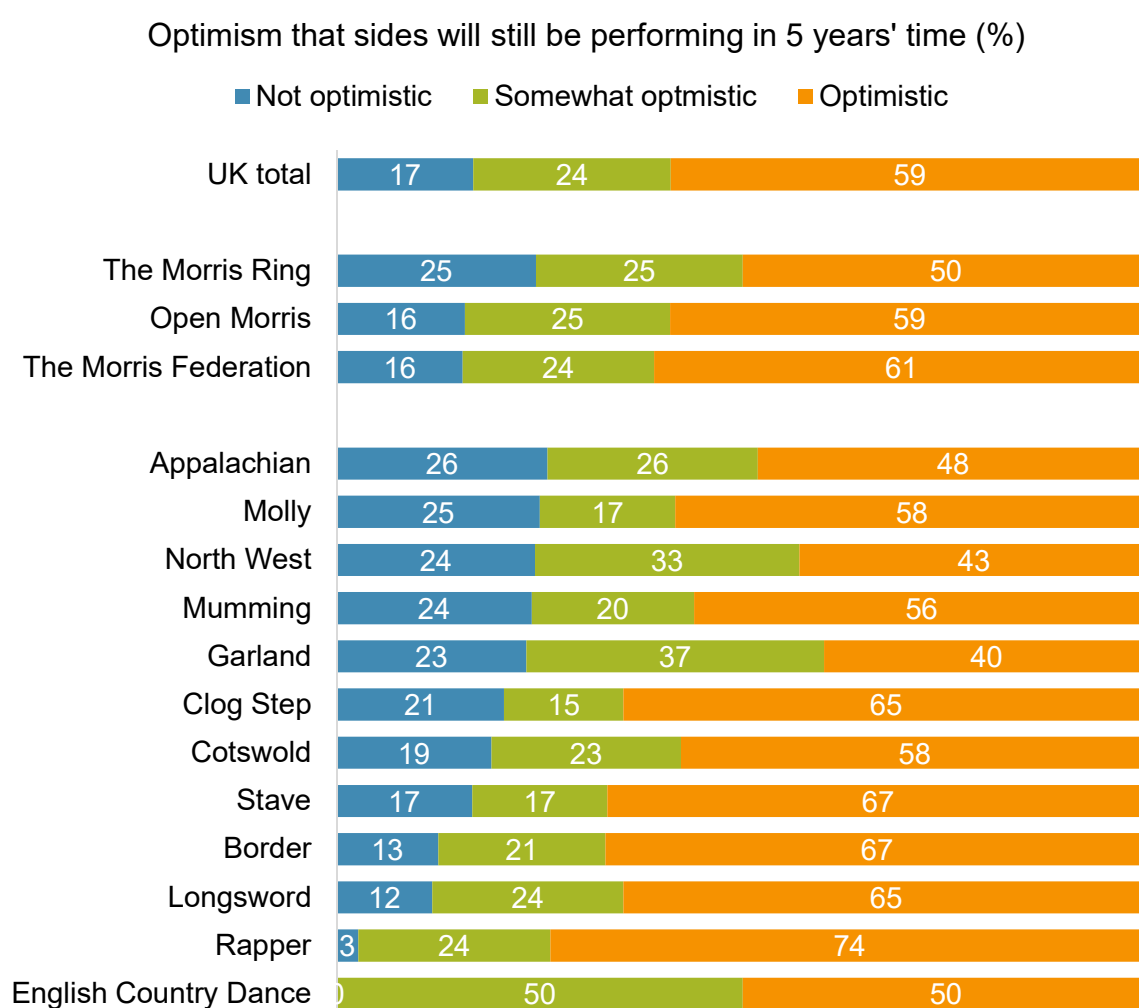
## 6 Optimism about the future

### Optimism

Sides were asked how optimistic they felt that they will still be performing in five years' time, from a scale of 1 (not at all optimistic) to 5 (very optimistic).

Figure 13 shows that a notable minority (17 per cent) of UK sides are not optimistic that they will still be performing in five years – scoring 1 or 2 on the scale. A greater proportion of Morris Ring sides (25 per cent) are not optimistic about the future, compared to sides in the Morris Federation and Open Morris (16 per cent). By style, Appalachian and Molly have the highest proportion of sides that are not optimistic, while Rapper, Longsword and Border sides have the lowest proportions.

**Figure 13 A notable minority of UK sides are not optimistic about continuing in future**



### Implications for the future

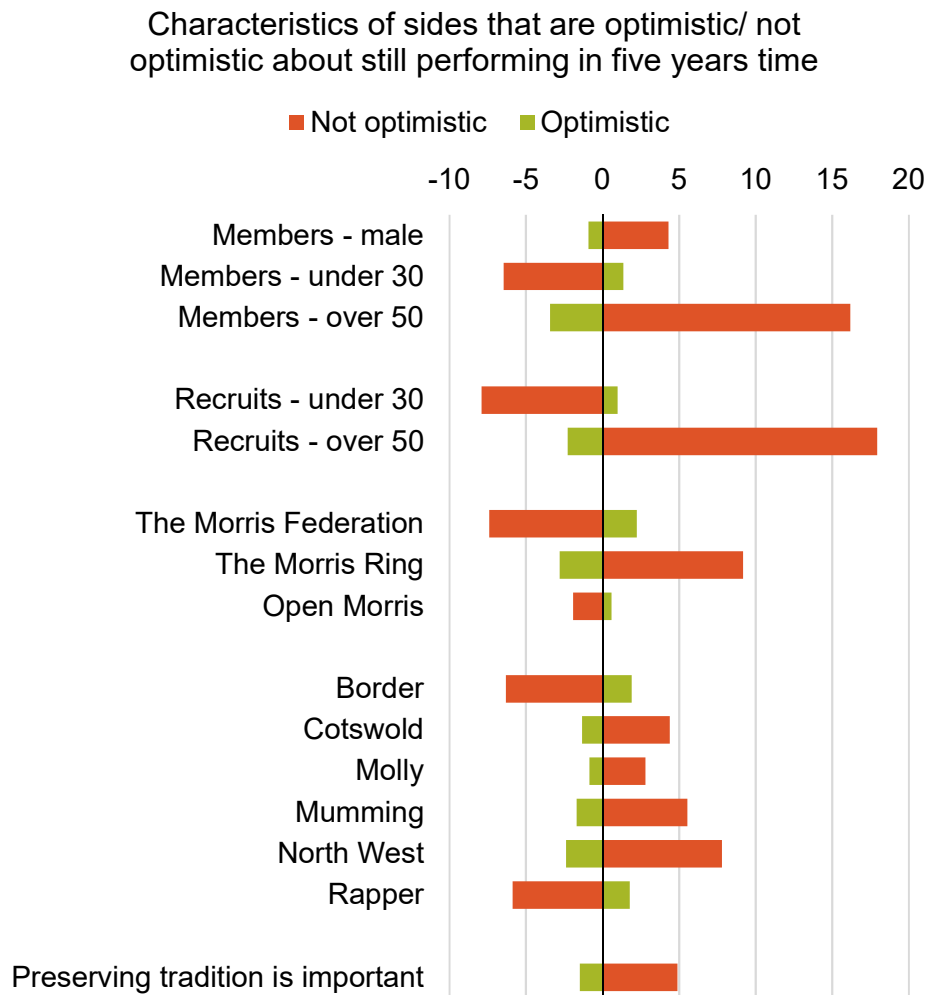
Figure 14 summarises the characteristics of sides that are not optimistic about the future and the sides that are optimistic about the future and compares them to the average among all sides. This analysis gives an impression of the characteristics that tend to be more associated with sides that seem more likely to fold. Indeed, analysis of 2014 Morris Census data shows that sides that were not optimistic about continuing were more likely to fold by

2020: a third of sides that were 'not at all optimistic' in 2014 had folded by 2020, compared to only five per cent of sides who were 'very optimistic'.

Figure 14 shows that sides that are not optimistic about the future have a higher proportion of members that are male, a higher proportion of members that are aged over 50 and a lower proportion of members aged under 30 than the average side. Sides that are not optimistic are more likely to be members of the Morris Ring, and are more likely to perform Cotswold, Molly, Mumming and North West than average. Sides that are not optimistic about the future are more likely to place important on preserving tradition.

In contrast, sides that are optimistic about the future (scoring 4 or 5) are the opposite compared to the average: more female, younger, have younger recruits, more likely to be in the Morris Federation or Open Morris, dance Border or Rapper and place less importance on preserving tradition.

**Figure 14 Sides that are not optimistic are more male and older than average**





## 7 Conclusions

The number of morris dancers in the UK has continued to grow, from 12,800 in 2014 to 13,600 in 2020. This is in spite of many signs of decline, not least a relatively old and ageing membership. Morris is also undergoing considerable demographic and stylistic change, albeit slowly.

Morris has reached gender balance and is likely to be majority-female in the future. The 2018 amendment to the Morris Ring constitution allowing sides with female dancers to be members is part of this story, as a quarter of Ring sides have since opened their membership fully to both sexes. However, the trends in recruitment (new recruits are two-thirds female) and side dissolution (sides that are not optimistic about continuing in the future are more male than average) have been leading morris towards being majority female over the longer term anyway.

However, more generally morris is unrepresentative of the population by age and ethnicity. Seven out of ten morris dancers are aged 50 or over and less than one per cent are of non-white ethnicity.

Stylistically, morris is becoming more diverse and less traditional. The proportion of sides that dance Cotswold – the most common style – has been falling over the past six years while the proportion dancing Border and Rapper has risen. The proportion of sides that place importance on preserving tradition has also fallen steadily over time. These are long running trends that are shown by the three Morris Census surveys from 2014-2020 as well as the patterns of side formation and dissolution, and therefore look set to continue further.

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