



A Sword Dance Union survey by Edwin Dyson

October / November 2013

A survey was commissioned for several reasons; firstly to use an opportunity to update some of the SDU membership logs, to discover some information about the state of sword dancing in the UK, but primarily to find out what UK sword dance teams know of the work of the Sword Dance Union.

From the latter will come a benchmark for future analysis and a potential re-evaluation of the SDU offering and how best to “sell membership” to new and existing teams.

The survey software used is called www.surveymonkey.com and existing membership lists and others were used to populate the survey. Survey Monkey is a free web-based survey builder and has basic administrative and analysis functions. Most of the analysis has been done by hand, as the limited functionality free version was used.

103 email survey invitations were sent out and 53 teams responded, a response rate of 51.4%.

The questions were as follows;

1. What is your dance team's name? And is it currently in existence?
2. Are you the correct contact person for your team?
3. Which answer best describes your team?
4. Is your team male, female or mixed?
5. Does your team have a website/Facebook presence and/or a twitter account?
6. Is your team a member of the Sword Dance Union?
7. What do you know about the work of The Sword Dance Union?
8. Would your team be interested in joining the Sword Dance Union?
9. Does your team take part in sword dance competitions? If not, why not?
10. Would your team be interested in hosting a sword dance competition?

Survey findings

1. There appears to be a healthy mix of teams dancing traditional sword dances in the UK, although more rapper teams responded than longsword.
2. Contact details for SDU member teams are reasonably up to date.
3. There are many more male teams dancing rapper or longsword than either mixed or female teams.
4. Most teams have an online presence, with over a third using Facebook and 17% using twitter. Fewer longsword teams use social media than rapper teams, perhaps reflecting a difference in membership age profile. There are several teams without websites.
5. 60% of teams responded that they were not SDU members or didn't know.
6. There is much work to do to communicate the aims of the Sword Dance Union and the benefits of membership. Over 40% of respondents said they didn't know anything about the aims or the membership benefits of the SDU, with a further 28% only mentioning one thing. Team comments are included.
7. 40% of respondents are open to joining the SDU. Further work could be completed on ascertaining and removing barriers to membership.
8. 22.6% of respondents said they regularly took part in competitions and 36% said “occasionally”. Teams commented on why they took part or didn't take part, some of which make for interesting reading.
9. Just under half of teams surveyed said either “yes” or “maybe” to hosting a sword dance competition.

Suggestions for actions by the Sword Dance Union

1. Revamp the website and social media channels, linking them all together to create a coherent series of messages
2. Use online and social media channels to increase visibility of and participation with the SDU
3. Remove any identified barriers to membership of the SDU
4. Create a strong message about the aims and objectives of the SDU and the benefits of membership for teams and communicate this effectively to increase membership and participation
5. Maintain regular contact with SDU members through emails, surveys, newsletters and engaging with them at events, online and through social media
6. Be visible as the SDU at events and competitions by the use of branded clothing/ID badges etc. and an information stand/stall

The answers

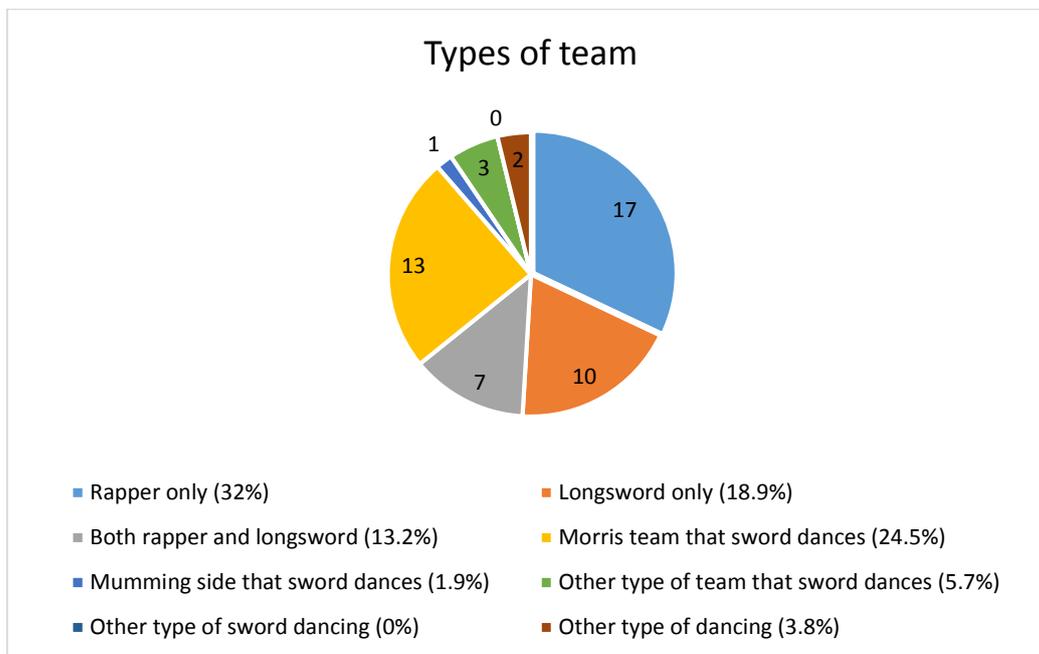
1. What is your dance team's name? And is it currently in existence?

53 teams out of 103 responded, a rate of 51.4%. A range of new, young, old and retired teams responded to the survey.

2. Are you the correct contact person for your team?

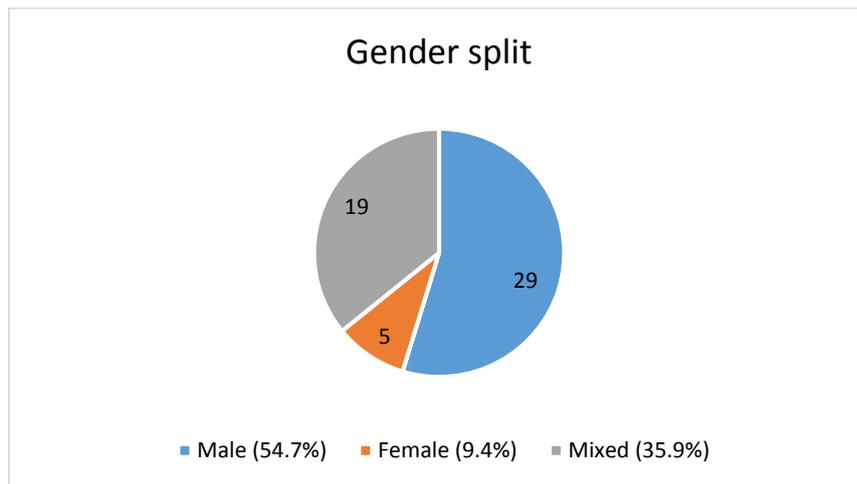
This question was to help The Sword Dance Union update its membership logs, several incorrect entries were amended.

3. Which answer best describes your team?



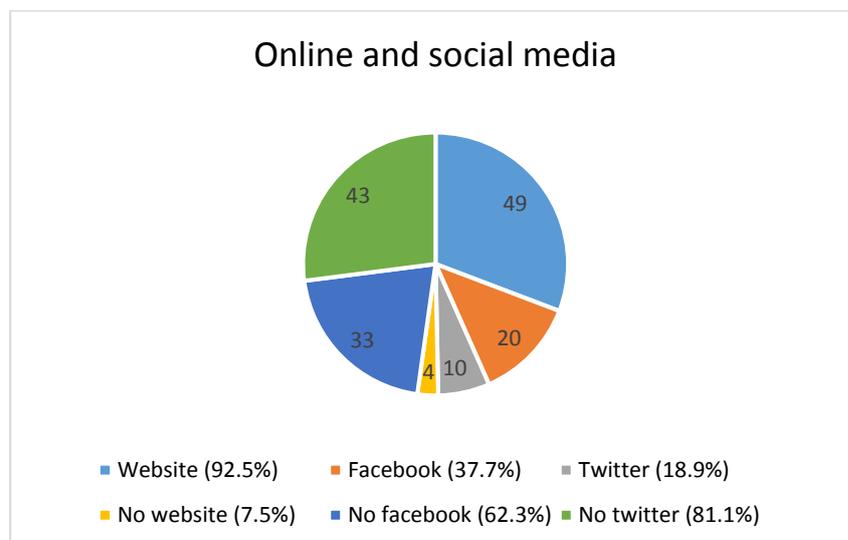
The majority of responses (65%) came from sword dancing teams that either specialised in rapper, longsword or dance both. A further 25% of respondents were from morris teams that also danced rapper, longsword or both. There was 1 response from a mumming team and 4 responses from other types of teams or sword dance traditions.

4. Is your team male, female or mixed?



The majority of teams that responded were male in make-up (29 – 54.7%) with more mixed teams than female teams. This could have something to do with the fact that there were 13 responses from morris teams, the majority of which were male in membership.

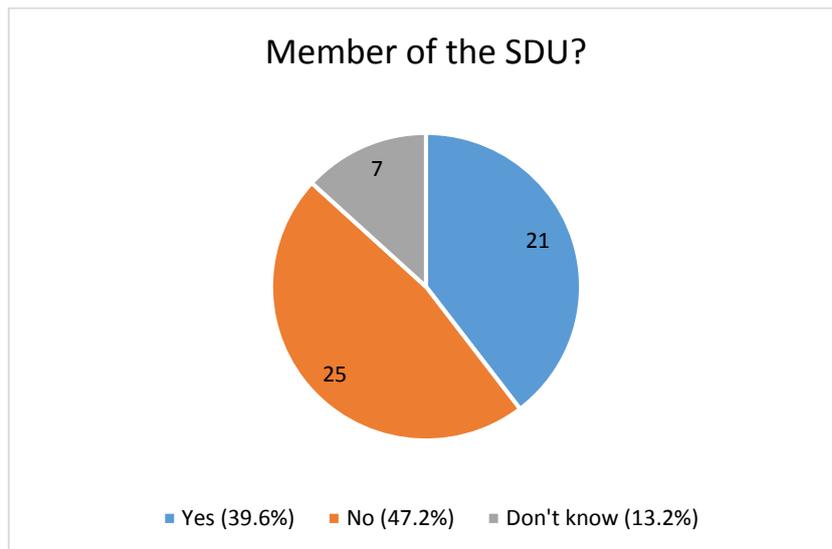
5. Does your team have a website/Facebook presence and/or a twitter account?



Out of 52 teams that responded 4 (over 7%) do not have a website! Facebook is the most used form of social media of the two asked about, with 37% of teams having Facebook and nearly 19% having twitter. It is clearly important to have an online presence of some sort, and to make that presence clearly communicated.

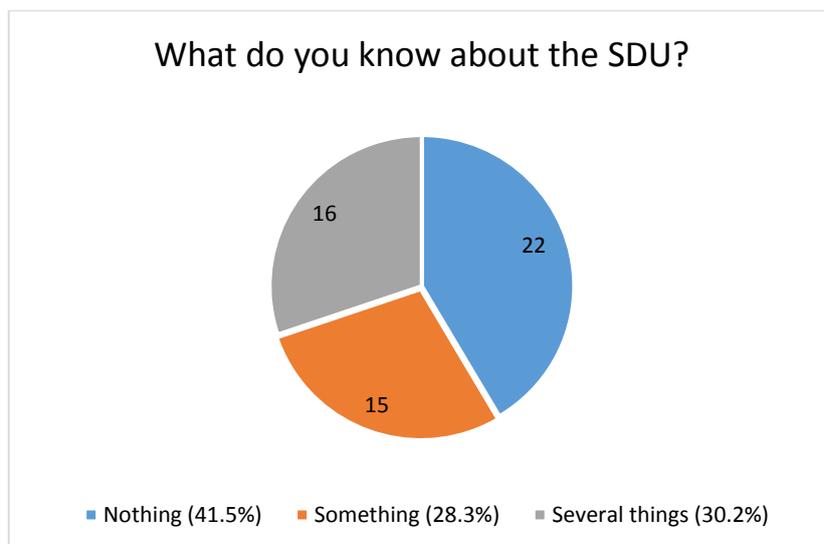
Using and maintaining an online presence is crucial in terms of recruitment and publicity, with the use of social media increasing amongst traditional dance teams. The latter is mainly for networking, intra-team communication, publicity and recruitment. If teams are looking to recruit younger members, then they need to spread their messages and communicate where their target membership hangs out.

6. Is your team a member of the Sword Dance Union?



Nearly half of sword dance teams surveyed reported not being members of the SDU. Over 13% reported not knowing whether they were members or not. This is clearly an opportunity both to inform teams of their membership status and to increase team membership of the SDU.

7. What do you know about the work of The Sword Dance Union?



There is a need for The Sword Dance Union to promote its activities and the benefits of membership.

Over 41% of respondents stated that they "knew nothing" or "didn't know" with a further 28% of respondents mentioning one of the Union's activities. This was primarily knowledge about the DERT and the other competitions with 4 people mentioning "sword hire". A further 30% mentioned two or more activities with 3 respondents managing to mention everything on the list.

There were some inaccuracies, particularly surrounding the insurance aspect.

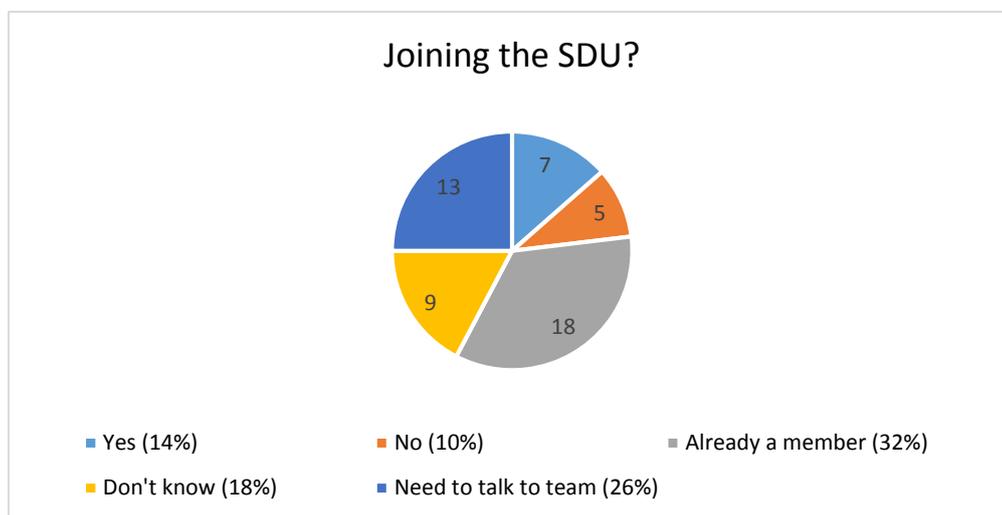
Some comments are quoted below.

- Don't know. I just speak to Phil when I need something. If there's ever a strike we will not cross the pickets! Solidarity!
- We are aware of the aims and benefits of the SDU

- Very little.
- Not a clue:-/
- Subscribe to Rattle Up Me Boys and see articles on SDU
- Nothing
- Only what Phil's told me, and that Jenny Day (Boojum) is treasurer!
- Don't know
- Everything. We just ran DERT
- Coordinating / organising competitions/events Hire of swords Information / archive material Contacts / network
- What I've read on the website.
- Workshops, competitions, archives and library resources
- Yes
- Promote and preserve dances.
- Not sure
- We are aware of the varied aims of the SDU, and support progress to address them. Particularly effective is the combined platform (of many Teams) to promote the cause generally and public interest more widely. Networking, internally and externally, is an important aspect of its role, highlighted by the organisation of the annual Day of Dance and Competition. The Archive work is also particularly significant, especially to continue vital digitalisation projects.
- No idea what the membership benefits are. It organises the annual longsword tournament, has an out of date website and (rumour has it) has an archive.
- Very little!
- SAME AS THE RING AND FED
- Not sure.
- Nothing
- Not a lot
- Supporting and promoting sword dance Organising competitions Lending swords
- That it promotes sword dancing. Not sure of the benefits.
- I know nothing about it, but our Rapper Sword tutor probably does. Please give me some more information.
- Don't know
- Not sure
- Not a lot.
- Not a lot to part one of your question.
- Nothing
- Shares info about rapper & long sword
- Promote sword dance has swords to lend out
- I know very little actually.
- Not much
- Yearly longsword competition. Irregular newsletter. No idea on the benefits of membership.
- Promotes sword dancing, organises events
- Supports all sword dancers Provides the continual impetus for Longsword and Rapper Competitions Provides the Sword Archive
- Supports sword dance interests.
- I believe that it connects teams from around the country giving them contact details and a database to draw from.
- You get the NUT on a regular basis. It holds sword dance archives. It hires out rapper swords. It has a day of dance. As an aside - the above question, are we members - I asked our bag to subscribe us but not sure it ever happened?? She has since left so if we are not members we do want to be... Thanks!
- Promote sword dancing. Benefits - not too sure. Access to archives?
- We are a Ring Side
- Do not know.
- Nothing
- Lots and lots. I've been around since the inception of the SDU but have never been a member. TBH, I'm not really sure what the SDU is for which is why none of my teams have ever joined it.
- I know nothing

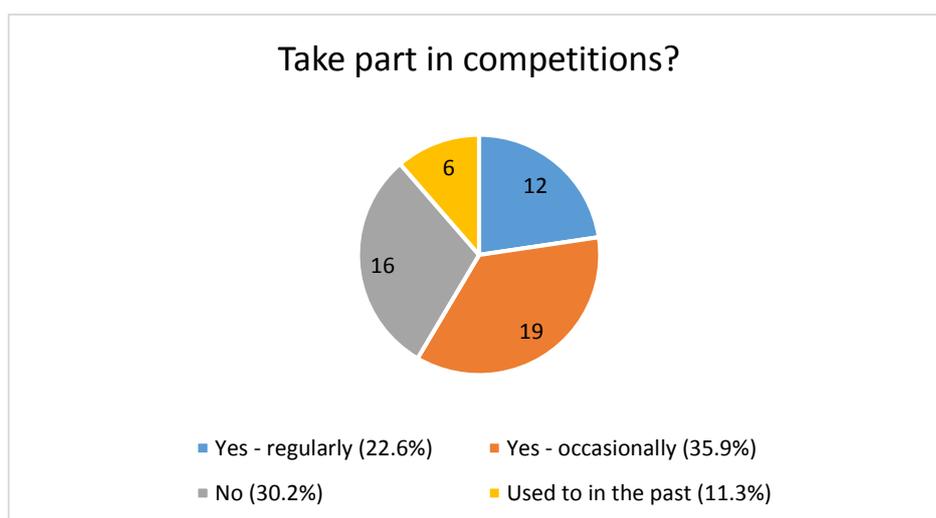
- Promotes Sword dancing and runs various events
- Promotes Sword dancing, hosts annual Longsword Tournament & DERT
- A place for sword dancers to keep in touch set up to give out awards too involved in competition organising archives, sword hire, info, access to experts.
- No idea. Centralised support for sword-dance sides?
- We know that you organise events (at least annually) but that is all
- Lots - recruitment, archive, development, support and more

8. Would your team be interested in joining the Sword Dance Union?



There is a development opportunity here. 40% of respondents are open to membership (Yes, or Need to talk to team) with a further 18% saying “don’t know”. Further analysis could be completed on the reasons why teams aren’t interested in becoming members of the SDU or discovering what the blockages to membership are.

9. Does your team take part in sword dance competitions?

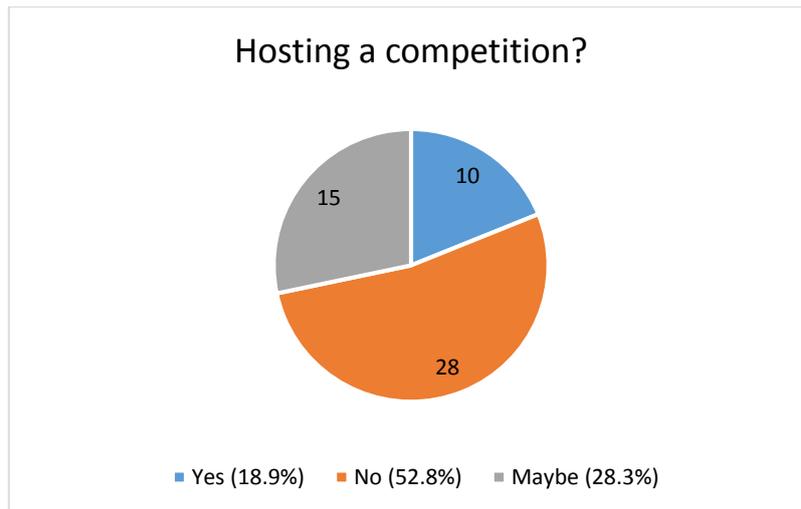


Nearly a quarter of teams surveyed said they regularly took part in competitions with a further 36% stating “Yes, occasionally”. There is another development opportunity here, to get rapper teams to DERT and the Championship, and longsword teams to the Tournament.

Some comments are listed below;

- Sharpe Sword used to enter DERT; Boojum don't do competition as made up of members of other sides that enter
- We entered DERT for the first time this year. I believe this is the only sword dance competition the club has taken part in.
- Currently less interest
- The current feeling from the Team is that there is no overwhelming reason to perform the Dance within a competitive arena. It is perceived as being extremely difficult to compare and assess diverse styles and characteristics fairly, uniformly and competently. The Dancers are happy to perform within an 'exhibition' context, and general feedback appears to respect and support this. However, the topic is open to review, and a younger membership may be more flexible.
- We hosted DERT in 2001
- Whitby Competitive stopped over 10 years ago. This was the only competition we really attended.
- we never had that thought as we are a fun side
- Red Door have done DERT once
- We struggle for numbers, so preparation for competitions is challenging
- Timing is usually tricky for us because we have a longish break in the summer
- We don't believe in competitive dancing.
- Haven't competed... YET!
- Just never have - don't want to compete
- Not interested in meaningless exercises
- Ours is a play, not just a dance.
- We only do two sword dances which are unique to our style of dance/area
- Actually - yes, we'll be entering DERT for the first time this March, and intend to be at all subsequent DERTs... Re Question 10 - what SDU competitions are there apart from the Longsword Tournament? Phil's got the North East rapper champs but to my knowledge, these have never been branded as SDU. And I believe that DERT is nothing to do with the SDU either (or hasn't been up until now...) Anyway, I've chatted to Phil about hosting a Manchester DERT in 2017/2018 and have suggested a Snark one in Whitby for 2015 which I'd be happy to participate in the organising of...
- Too much pressure!
- Don't feel the need, we dance as a tradition.
- Only ever entered DERT 3 times and for particular reasons (one to do the Kingsmen dance 'cos they said traditional categories were for men!!!). Most recently in York 2006 we realised that many judges are biased and just 'don't like us'. We dance like we want to dance and therefore don't want to be judged by people who aren't on the same wavelength.
- Not interested in competing in principle
- only just set up

10. Would your team be interested in hosting a sword dance competition? (SDU assistance is available!)



There are several teams that would be willing to host a competition, either rapper or longsword, with over a further quarter that might consider it. These teams are from all across the UK and include cities that have never hosted a sword event before.

Edwin Dyson
The Sword Dance Union
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