

Recruiting and Retaining New Ringers

One of the questions that the Education Officers are most often asked is how to recruit and retain ringers. Below, are the results of their brainstorming sessions on these subjects, which they hope that you will find very helpful and useful.

Important points to be aware of when recruiting new ringers

The leadership role will be crucial, whether it is an individual or a team

It will be very beneficial if the leader, or one of the leaders, is an experienced tutor. If this is not the case help can be obtained from the Branch's Education Officer

Hard work by the people involved will be essential

One of the most important aspects will be face to face contact

The recruitment route chosen will depend of the size of the community. Some ideas will be more suitable in a town and others in a hamlet or village.

As well as working alone, it is possible for a benefice or other group of towers to recruit together

Help will be available from the Branch's Education Officer

Recruitment materials are available from the Central Council and other sources (see below)

If appropriate, funding would be available from the Association Education Budget

If anyone from the tower would like to learn to teach or improve their teaching their Branch/Association Education Officer would be able to give them details of the next Association of Ringing Teachers Training Scheme course and arrange for a Mentor to work with them through the course

Important points to stress when recruiting new ringers

Those who ring gain great pleasure from it. It is a very exciting, interesting and entertaining activity with many opportunities to join in fun activities. There are other reasons which make it an excellent activity to choose

It is a very social activity, with the opportunity to meet many different people and make new friends, and also to take part in the social events and outings which are part of ringing life

There is also the opportunity to visit amazing places, from small villages that you would probably never visit otherwise to cathedrals and other secular places where bells are found

It is a team activity

It is a good mental workout

It helps keep you fit

There are endless opportunities to learn new things

Ringling is well within the capabilities of most people

People come from all walks of life, and are of all ages

It is taking part in a traditional skill

It can be a service to the church if you want it to be

Special points to be aware of when recruiting new young ringers

Put into practice the Diocese's Safeguarding Policy in relation to young people

It is a big advantage to attract a peer group of friends

Useful tools

Recruitment posters and leaflets from the Central Council

Bell ringing posters also available from www.bellringing.org;

ART recruitment DVD, 'The Inside Story';

New ART book, 'Discover Bell Ringing'.

Mobile bells and frames can be borrowed from within the branch or nearby

Some ways to recruit new ringers

Hold an 'Open Morning/Afternoon/Evening/Day' where people can come along and see the bells (if at all possible, have a model if this is not possible) and have a go at ringing

Set up a video feed to show the bells in action to people down in the church

Arrange a 'taster session' for a targeted group

Take part in a school's Music Week or Activity Week – giving taster sessions

Take part in an Activity Fair

Run bell ringing as an Evening Class or as an activity on the school curriculum

(The people chosen to meet the recruits are very important – they should be able to convey enthusiasm, interest in the possible recruit and knowledge about the bells and ringing, etc. It is also important when recruiting in the tower have refreshments available; make the environment in the belfry clean and bright; notice boards up-to-date; ringing materials for them to look at; etc.)

Make it clear that ringing is a community activity and all are welcome; ringers do not have to be a member of the church or attend church services – some do and some don't

Some means to attract new recruits in different locations

Use a mobile bell and frame which can be put up outside the church/in the middle of the town/village

Use a mobile bell and frame at the local fête or show

Groups that can be targeted

Cubs, Scouts, Guides, Adventure Scouts, etc

Other Church groups e.g. choir, young people's church groups, etc

Youth groups

Local organisations that might be looking for a speaker

Those who have just moved into the area

Newly retired

Women's Institutes and Townswomen's Guilds

Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme participants

Arranging 'clubs'

After-school club for the local primary or secondary school

School holiday club/week

Secondary School Activity Week activity (school staff member to support, tower to provide the handling teaching)

Advertising

Posters on local notice boards

Leaflets either posted through letterboxes, displayed in shops/schools/health centres/ etc.

In the parish magazine, on local radio/television

Ensuring that bell ringing is included as a community activity in the Village/Town Welcome Pack

Social media e.g. Twitter and Facebook

How to retain new ringers

The leadership role is crucial for the successful retention of learners of whatever age

People take up new activities because they are enjoyable, possibly because of the new social opportunities or for new challenges, etc. Therefore –

1. Make practices fun because enjoyment is important
2. Emphasise the social side of ringing e.g. importance of visiting the pub for a drink and chat after the weekly practice
3. Ensure that there are challenges along the way for those that enjoy this (not everyone)

To retain learners, practices should: -

1. Put the learner first, giving time and effort to help them enjoy the activity
2. Have the learner engaged for the majority of the session, not sitting around waiting to have a go
3. Therefore the practice will need to be at a different time to the tower's main practice and at a time to suit the learner e.g. before the main practice, during the day, on a Saturday morning, early evening, etc. 4.
4. Be arranged as often as possible, especially in the first few months of learning, as learners will progress faster if they ring more often
5. Practice sessions should be carried out with tied bells, and a simulator (if possible). This will facilitate extra practices, as well as maintaining good relations with the neighbours

Note that one of the reasons that ringers are lost at an early stage is if they become bored

The tutor should also ensure that in practices: -

1. An interesting and enjoyable environment is maintained so that ringing can compete against other hobbies
2. A very positive and encouraging atmosphere is maintained by the tutor and helpers to help the learner to gain confidence

When teaching the tutor should: -

1. Teach taking gradual steps forward, with each new step being easy to achieve, and gradually building up to the whole action
2. Help the learner to develop and improve their skills, and also to be able to choose when to use each skill
3. Place importance on the learner trying hard to succeed. Stress that mistakes are not failures but essential to learning
4. The tutor should provide the overall direction and instruction, but allow the learner to help make decisions when this is appropriate so that they are more involved in the learning process

As a tutor: -

1. Get to know the learner/learners really well and choose the right approach for each one – they will all be different
2. Be able to adapt practices for different learners
3. Be able to work at different speeds for different learners
4. Have lots of patience, especially with those who learn more slowly
5. Make sure that feedback is positive and helpful
6. Always be approachable when the learner needs advice
7. Use lots of praise when this is deserved
8. Use lots of encouragement especially when learners try hard, even if they are not as successful as they would like to be

If these and other points below are used the learner should feel valued and involved in the activity and therefore have a greater commitment to it

One of the most important things for retaining new ringers is excellent teaching standards, both in the bell handling stages and as the ringer progresses. If this is not available in the tower, help can be obtained from the local branch

If there are several people learning and extra teachers are needed, again help can be obtained from the local branch

For all learners achievement will be important, without it enthusiasm will not be maintained. People will see achievement differently, for some it will be praise from other ringers, for others achieving the present goal, for others ringing a quarter peal of the method they are learning, etc.

In addition to other points mentioned, setting goals can be used to help a learner to progress. Goals: -

1. Focus the learner's attention on the action they are trying to achieve
2. Encourage the learner to persevere
3. Help build self-confidence when a goal is achieved
4. Should be set by the learner and the tutor together
5. Need to vary in difficulty, from short-term goals which can be achieved easily (to maintain enthusiasm), to long-term goals which will take a little longer to attain and possibly combine the achievement of several short-term goals
6. Can be challenging but must be seen as achievable by the learner
7. Should always be set positively, something to try to do (not to try not to do)

Note that the achievement of goals set will be affected by the quality of the teaching and feedback from the tutor; that Award Schemes (see below) are a good way of setting goals; and that goals will not improve the performance of a learner already motivated to do their best

Excellent foundation skills (handling, bell control, listening, striking and theory) will be very important because: -

1. Good foundation skills can be built on later to develop performance
2. Without them the learner will become stuck at a level below that of which they are capable

Note that one of the reasons that ringers are lost at a later stage is because they are unable to progress due to poor foundation skills

Note that other reasons why ringers are lost can include a lack of variety in the activities used in practices, that the learner feels under too much pressure to achieve, that goals set are too difficult and not seen as achievable, that a goal is achieved but no new ones set and the learner feels that the tutor/helpers are not interested in helping them to progress

As well as the practices at their own tower they can also be encouraged to attend open handling sessions at a tower in the branch where a team of teachers is working and anyone is welcome to attend. Details will be available from the Branch Education Officer

Encouraging new ringers to go on regular local courses will enable them to make faster progress and also to meet other local ringers. They will also have the opportunity to share experiences with people at the same stage of ringing as themselves

Incentives can be provided by local or national award schemes. In this Association the award schemes available are the Young Ringers Award and the Young Ringer of the Year Competition, and nationally, the Learning the Ropes Award Scheme

There is a big advantage for young new ringers in learning with a peer group of friends. Another great help for them is attending local young ringers' practices where they can meet other young ringers and ring with people of their own age. Also, taking part in events such as young ringers' outings and striking competitions is important

The tutor should be aware when teaching young ringers of the need to: -

1. Emphasise the fun aspects e.g. bell control exercises and games
2. Have quizzes and games available as a fun way to learn theory
3. Have a practice session length to suit the individual
4. Ask the young ringer lots of questions, e.g. what was good about that practice, encouraging them to be more involved in their learning
5. Be enthusiastic

It is also advantageous for older ringers to learn in a group, either with people from other towers or just from their own tower

The tutor should be aware when teaching adults that: -

1. They will often need more complicated explanations than young ringers
2. They will probably be more aware of the potential for injury than young ringers

If teaching nervous learners, either adults or young ringers, the tutor should: -

1. Treat their concerns seriously, as they are real to the learner
2. Be aware that they will learn more slowly
3. Be sure that they are confident with one stage before moving on to the next
4. When teaching handling stay close to the learner until they are confident for the tutor to move away

New learners of any age need to feel part of the team. Social activities, ringing outings, roles within the band, etc., are all important in helping to develop team spirit. This will affect a ringer's attitude and their frequency of attendance.

Also useful is developing a team identity e.g. by having a tower tee shirt or sweat shirt

As the new ringer becomes more competent taking part in branch events, ringing outings, quarter peals and striking competitions will all add to enjoyment and thus retention

As the ringer becomes more competent, as well as continuing to attend courses, ringing quarter peals, etc., they should also be encouraged to travel to ring at towers with the expertise needed to enable them to continue to progress

Jill Hansford and the Branch Education Officers