



Case Study 1

BRISTOL CHORAL SOCIETY

Apprenticeship Scheme

BCS is a large choral society of around 170 members that sings from a broad range of styles and periods. The choir gives at least 3 performances a year as well as an annual "Come and Sing event". Although the choir enjoys a strong membership, like many societies it is aware that in order to secure a successful future, it needs to attract more young people into its ranks.

In 2004, BCS adopted a proactive policy for working with children and young people and currently has three main strands of activity:

- a) an annual programme of outreach work in inner-city primary schools (4 per year)
- b) apprenticeships for 14-19 year olds (which this case study focuses on)
- c) attached choirs (where members of a school's choir may join us for an appropriate concert and its attendant rehearsals)

Three years later, the choir has over 13 young apprentices who regularly sing with the choir.

Why? Like many other choirs, BCS noticed a distinct lack of fresh young faces amongst its membership. But why put in the effort of recruiting and nurturing young people, when they are likely to leave home and move away from the area within a few years? Surely this would only benefit other societies, wherever they move to. There are also costs to take into account and the patience and commitment of existing members. Well, yes, that's all true. However, BCS felt that if other choirs not only benefited from their scheme, but also adopted a similar scheme, then in the end everyone should benefit. The aim of the scheme is to encourage young people to enjoy the pleasures and disciplines of choral singing and to support this country's fine choral tradition by helping to nurture the next generation of singers for the good of all choirs.

Who? The scheme is open to all young people 14 years or over. There are no auditions and all costs, including fees, music hire, travel for concerts outside of Bristol, are covered by the choir. The young people are heard by the MD and allocated a voice part. The Secretary then assigns them to a mentor of the same voice part, who they sing next to during rehearsals and concerts. They are now fully-fledged choir members and expected to behave, dress, attend etc. just as everyone else does.

How? Recruitment has been predominantly by word of mouth through members and their friends and colleagues. Information was sent out to all local secondary schools, music services and many singing teachers, but with little response. A personal approach to these bodies might yield better results. The slow recruitment has been beneficial in terms of making the absorption of the young people into the choir easier to manage. All but two who tried the scheme have stayed and enjoyed it.

BCS have been careful to formalise the scheme through the appointment of an Apprenticeship Manager, and also through careful selection and training of mentors (who are all CRB checked). There is a job description for the manager, guidance notes for mentors, a Policy for working with young people and a Policy for the Safeguarding of Children and Young People. All of these are available for other societies who are interested in setting up a similar scheme.

BCS keep mainstream accounts separate from any costs relating to young people and all their youth work is fundraised for separately. This allows them to assess the financial cost of the scheme in isolation, and prevents any inadvertent subsidising by the main budget of the choir. However, it is also a lot of extra work for whoever is responsible for finding the money!

Why Not?

Other choirs who might be interested in setting up an apprenticeship scheme need to be aware that the process needs active management and a dedicated choir member to keep the project on course. Also, the mentor role is not always completely straightforward and can throw up unexpected problems – such as the youngster who isn't met at the end of the concert and can't be left hanging around Bristol city centre on her own on a Saturday night!

Despite the extra effort and potential pitfalls, seeing the excitement on a young person's face as they come off-stage after a full-on performance with a professional orchestra and soloists is enough to convince all of us that the effort is well worth it!

What Next?

The apprenticeship scheme has proved extremely successful for BCS, and they are keen to encourage other choirs who would like to try something similar. BCS have kindly said that they are happy for anyone to use their scheme as a model, as long as they are given proper acknowledgement, and have made all of their documentation available. Why not give it a go?

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