

From Practice to Perfect

How Church Bell ringers are
trained, safeguarded and
organised



**A short guide for clergy, PCCs and
Safeguarding Advisors**

From practice to perfect:



How church bell ringers are trained, safeguarded and organised

A short guide for clergy, PCCs and Church officers

Every Sunday, in over 5,000 churches in the UK and beyond, around 38,000 bell ringers climb tower staircases, stand in circles and speak the Christian message to all, reminding those who hear their bells that the church is at the heart of their community.

But bell ringers are unlike other church supporters. After ringing for service, many go straight to a second or a third tower, such is the national shortage of ringers. Most will have devoted over 100 hours to master the basics of their art. Thereafter, just as orchestras need constant rehearsal, many ringers attend one, two or three practice nights each



week in different churches, investing thousands more hours to hone their skills.

When they are not ringing, some can be found in their belfry with a spanner in their hand. Ringers and ringing societies contribute large sums towards church bells, which they generally maintain themselves, but this work is often unseen. And whilst they make a substantial commitment in time and energy to support the Church's mission they come from many

backgrounds, and from all faiths and none.

Pictures front: Association of Ringing Teachers and above: James Wray, RWNYC, The Ringing World.



THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF CHURCH
BELL RINGERS

UK Registered Charity No. 270036

At least since the 16th century, English change ringing has been part of the British national soundscape. It is also a team-based public performance. Bell ringing is music like no other; not written on a standard score, but performed from memory. It is learnt by reference to the path which each bell takes across thousands of unique changes, and conducted using language evolved since the sixteenth century, part-engineering, part-mathematics.

The vast majority of ringing takes place in remote ringing rooms, high up in church towers, at times when the clergy and congregation have not arrived or are long gone. Inevitably bell ringing must be well organised and supervised. This short guide for **clergy, PCCs and Safeguarding Advisers** explains:

- **Why ring**
- **Who bell ringers are**
- **How they are organised**
- **What is done about training, insurance and safeguarding**

Why ring?

Whilst many bell ringers are not members of the congregation, the vast majority belong to a wider group



of church supporters, who are attracted because they are committed to the church's place as part of their community and the national fabric. The industry of bell ringing, whether in maintenance of church bell installations or in the performance of ringing itself is done to achieve something which is valued by both community and church.

Bell ringing's fusion of physical skill, music, engineering, history and mathematics makes it a rewarding, almost immersive, pursuit for those who take it up. For those who care to climb the staircase, church bands are inclusive and non-judgmental communities, who welcome all who share their journey.

It's therefore no surprise that church bells are rung almost entirely on the basis of volunteer effort. Bell ringers give their time to train new recruits, to maintain the bells, fundraise for their upkeep and ring at services. For its part the Church gives the chance to learn and the opportunity to ring the bells at other times.

Other than time, there is little or no cost to learn to ring and few new ringers pay to learn. In return they support their local church by ringing for service and in due course train others, making the ringing tradition more accessible than many.

Ringling is unusual in that people of all ages and builds can learn, although progress is faster for those who take it up early in life and it is not unusual to see young ringers mentoring much older learners.



Who are bell ringers?

Until recently, most bell ringers learned to ring through family and church connections. But church choirs and Sunday schools, once a fertile ground for recruitment, are diminished. Declining congregations mean that new bell ringers now come from a diverse range of backgrounds regardless of faith.



How is bell ringing organised?

Tower bands

The fundamental unit of organisation, whose ambition is to maintain ringing for Sunday services. Most tower bands practise one evening a week and are supervised by a 'tower captain' or 'ringing master' whose appointment is agreed by their PCC or incumbent.

Most bands teach new ringers and many organise outings to other towers to help their ringers develop good handling on different weights and rings of bells.

In larger churches and cathedrals, the local band may have greater formality, with a constitution and committee. From the smallest church to the largest cathedral, local bands welcome both learners and visiting ringers alike.

Clusters

It is common for local bands within a town or benefice to join together to achieve critical mass needed for practice and service ringing.

Territorial Associations

Most towers are affiliated to a territorial association, usually covering a county or diocese. Larger associations are subdivided into branches or districts, often aligned with archdeaconry or deanery boundaries.

Territorial associations offer focussed training sessions and support on matters of recruitment, belfry maintenance, safeguarding and insurance. Their officers liaise with the church and other stakeholders at regional or diocesan level. The vast majority have their own Safeguarding Officer.

Most run bell restoration funds through charitable trusts, raising many thousands of pounds to support the restoration and maintenance of church bells in their area.



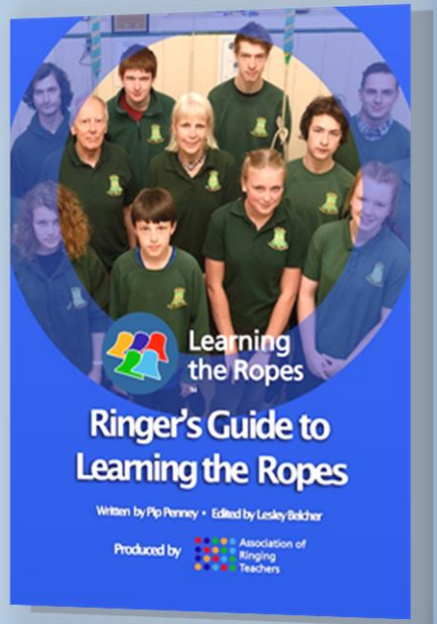
The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers



The Central Council brings together ringers around the world, and its member societies constitute the vast majority of territorial associations in the UK and overseas, including North America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

The Council offers resources for bell ringers, promotes the art of church bell ringing in society at large and works with government and the Church at national level.

Recent work includes the national “*Ringin’ Remembers*” project to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Armistice Day and collaboration with the Church of England’s Recovery Team in responding to the Covid pandemic.



Association of Ringing Teachers

The Association of Ringing Teachers was formed in 2012 to promote the highest standards of teaching across the ringing community. It provides training on teaching techniques, publishes teaching materials and its structured learning pathway “*Learning the Ropes*” has been used by thousands of new recruits in recent years.



Non Territorial Associations

Non Territorial Associations are the oldest element of organisation, bringing bell ringers from many regions and dioceses together on the basis of shared profession, interest or attainment. They range from the Ancient Society of College Youths, formed in 1637 to promote excellence in ringing, through university societies, professional guilds such as the National Guild of Police Ringers founded in 1931 to the recently formed Young Change Ringers Association. Non-territorial associations provide a significant learning opportunity through ringing tours and tower visits.

Where is ringing done?

Ringling in church settings

Permission to ring in a tower setting is granted by the incumbent, either directly or via their churchwarden or tower captain. Any form of church bell ringing requires advance permission to maintain insurance requirements.

Visiting Ringers

Bell ringers are travellers, and few churches could ring for service if ringers did not help nearby towers. Ringing in different towers and on different bells is also important in developing technique. Whether arranged by a tower band, association or more informally by a group needing specific practice, ringing away from a bell ringer's home tower is a vital element of their skills development and is rewarded by better ringing back at home.

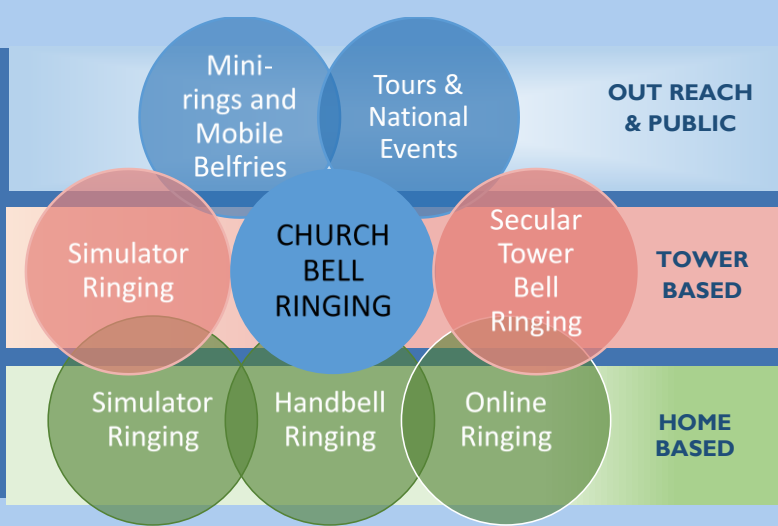


Picture James Wray, RWNYC,
The Ringing World.

Ringling away from church

Surprisingly much bell ringing takes place away from church settings, at secular venues such as Manchester Town Hall, buildings managed by the Churches Conservation Trust, on simulators or 'mobile belfries' at school and community events. Many bell ringers develop their skills through home-based handbell ringing and recent years have seen the growth of online ringing, using software tools enabling ringers to practise together from home using PCs or mobile devices.

**Where
Bell
Ringing
takes
place**
....



Training

Bell ringers generally learn to ring at individual tower or cluster level, supervised by tower captains. This is supplemented through formal training organised by ringing associations and a range of residential and non-residential courses. Almost all training is performed by a team including a tower captain and a number of experienced ringers, acting as helpers to support a group of learners. Learning is about skills development and many teachers attend teacher training courses organised by the Association of Ringing Teachers.

Insurance

Parish insurance covers ringing in church settings and events organised by the parish or tower captain. This also extends to visiting ringers when joining a service or practice or when

requesting to ring the bells for training or a specific performance¹. Tower captains deal with risk assessments.

Territorial ringing associations maintain separate events cover. The Association of Ringing Teachers provides specialist insurance cover to its members when running teaching sessions. The Central Council meets regularly with Ecclesiastical Insurance to review risk.

¹ This guidance refers to Ecclesiastical Insurance policyholders. Other insurers may have different conditions.

 ecclesiastical



Safeguarding

Safeguarding belongs to everyone and it is a key objective of all ringing societies that those who ring should feel safe and properly supported. Successful recruitment and retention depends on new ringers feeling confident about their progress and their safety.

What are the risks?

At first sight, a number of aspects of church bell ringing appear to present heightened safeguarding challenges:

- physical segregation
- long learning curve
- movement of ringers between churches
- decline in the size or competence of an individual tower band, leading to undue dependence on one or two key individuals
- the inclusivity of bell ringing and its welcoming approach to all regardless of age, culture or faith, meaning that not all bell ringers will be members of the church community

Over the years, these risks have been managed through informal and formal controls which promote safe environments. Few of the 2,504 safeguarding concerns reported to dioceses in 2018 ⁽²⁾ are known to have involved members of the 38,000-strong bell ringing community, but the view of bell ringing societies is that even one case is one too many.

Natural Surveillance

Church bell ringing is invariably performed by a band of more than four people, mostly members of their local community, and tower practices are typically attended by upwards of eight, plus visitors and parents.

Training is almost always performed by teaching groups comprising a leader and a team of experienced helpers in situations where pupils are not unduly dependent on one individual. Bell ringing welcomes those of all ages and children often learn to ring along with their parents.

Bell ringing is not hierarchical and bell ringers are not averse to speaking up when they feel something is not right.

² Diocesan Self-assessment Key Safeguarding Data 2018



Formal Controls

Informal controls are underpinned by formal safeguarding arrangements. All Church of England tower bands are covered by the Church's **Safeguarding Learning and Development Framework**, which involves participation in the Core Learning Pathway up to Basic Awareness level. This is important in culture setting, ensuring that ringers have both the tools **and confidence** to deal with a potential concern.

Appointment of tower captains and those who lead training of children follows **Safer Recruitment and People Management** guidance and (subject to diocesan policy) involves the Foundation training module. Ringers in local leadership roles take the Leadership module where determined by local context.

The Central Council publishes specific guidance on safe learning and working practices, leadership in ringing and the promotion of a healthy ringing culture. Belfries which train ringers display Safeguarding notices.

Ringing associations have their own Safeguarding Policies and Officers, who work with their Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser(s).

Members of the Association of Ringing Teachers undergo an enhanced DBS check with barred list as a condition of membership.

Support & Audit Arrangements

The Central Council offers policy guidance for ringing societies and works closely with the Church of England's National Safeguarding Team.

The Council has also worked with safeguarding charities Thirtyone:Eight, Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and Ann Craft Trust to deliver a range of supporting services, including safeguarding policy reviews, templates, self-audits and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checking.



Information and a range of tools and guidance for ringers and ringing societies is provided on the Central Council's website at

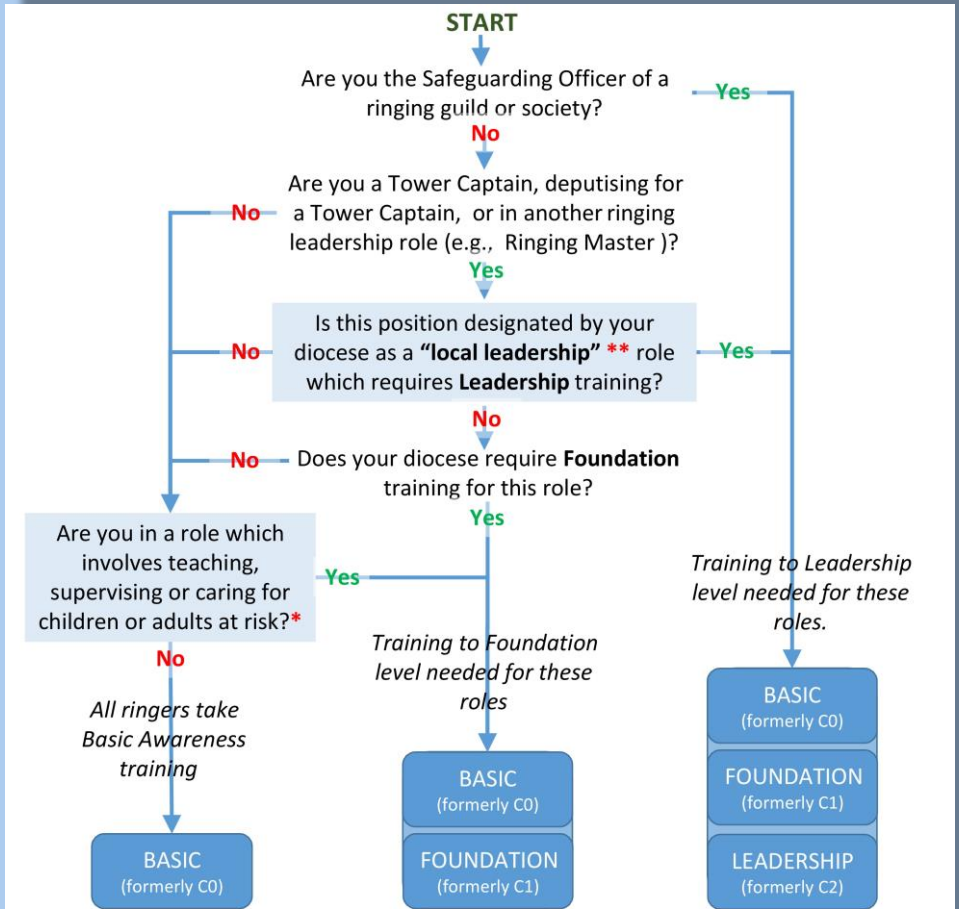
www.cccbr.org.uk/safeguarding



Safeguarding Training – decision-matrix for ringing

The decision framework below sets out the **minimum** levels of Safeguarding training for church bell ringers based on the Safeguarding

Learning & Development Framework and supplementary guidance issued by the Church of England’s National Safeguarding Team in January, 2022.



* For a more extensive definition, please refer to the Disclosure & Barring Service guides to Child and Adult Workforce Roles for Registered Bodies & Employers

** Each diocese determines which roles have "local leadership" and require leadership training, based on national guidance, their assessment of local conditions and input from the local territorial ringing society or association

Codes of Conduct

Social media exaggerates both good and bad and there is always a risk that online behaviour by someone who happens to be a bell ringer will reflect poorly on the bell ringing community. The Central Council is developing a code of conduct for online activity for adoption by ringing associations.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do ringers get paid?

Other than in a handful of the largest cathedrals, ringing in churches is provided entirely by volunteers.

Occasionally, ringers may receive a small sum for ringing at a wedding. The Church of England's guidance "The Cost of Church Weddings" sets out a range of "optional extras", which include bell ringers, church flowers, organist and choir, but few of the volunteers providing these services are under a contract (whether employment or service-related).

Are DBS checks required to ring at services, weddings or outings?

Ringing at services, weddings or outings does not fall within the definition of Regulated Activity or

Work with Children unless it involves teaching/supervision of children or providing someone to drive children, more than once. It will be Regulated Activity, if it takes place on more than 3 days in any 30 day period or involves overnight supervision ³

When are DBS checks relevant for ringers?

Whilst legislation prescribes those activities **eligible** for DBS checks, individual dioceses and responsible organisations will assess each role and request checks for eligible roles based on the risk. The Central Council offers resources to help dioceses develop appropriate policy.

³ Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, Schedule 4 as amended.



Picture Luke Smith, RWNVC, The Ringing World.

Are DBS certificates portable?

Ringers, like musicians, travel and the system would break down if checks performed by one parish were not recognised in another. In many dioceses DBS checks are portable between parishes lying within the same diocese and the Central Council supports dioceses who wish to recognise checks made in other dioceses where the individual concerned has enrolled in the DBS update service.

What are the requirements for visiting bands?

Visiting bands receive permission to ring by the incumbent or their nominee and the leader of a visiting band is responsible for ensuring that Safeguarding procedures are appropriate for the event and those attending. A parish may ask for this assurance.

The church which is being visited is responsible for providing a safe physical environment for all its visitors, with liability covered under its parish insurance policy.

In the case of events organised outside church settings, tower events are covered under the parish insurance policy whilst association events are covered under the association's insurance.

Should all tower captains take the Leadership training module?

The Learning and Development Framework targets Leadership Training at those who “significantly influence the culture of that church body”.⁴ Within this context, Diocesan Safeguarding Advisers have considerable scope to define training requirements which are appropriate for their local context and territorial associations are encouraged to support their DSA(s) in the development of appropriate policies. Whilst some dioceses require all tower captains to take Leadership training, others do not or have preferred to focus on prominent towers such as cathedrals, which have more complex governance arrangements.

Should all ringers take Foundation training?

The Foundation module is intended for those working with children or adults at risk. In line with national guidance on DBS eligibility, “working with children” means those giving or leading training rather than ringers helping or demonstrating at training sessions which are supervised by a tower captain or equivalent trainer.

⁴ Safeguarding Learning & Development Framework, page 22

How are ringers recruited?

Tower captains are appointed by PCCs and all those whose work could be expected to involve “substantial contact” with children or adults at risk are recruited in accordance with the Church’s guidance on Safer Recruitment and People Management.

Tower captains carefully consider the technical and team-working skills of each new recruit to ensure they are given the right opportunities.

How can Safeguarding be made more relevant to ringers and other church supporters?

A number of dioceses are developing innovative Safeguarding courses targeted at all church supporters, volunteers or workers, including those who may not necessarily have joined the congregation. Please contact the Central Council if your diocese is interested in developing a similar training offer.

My tower doesn’t have a band. How do I get ringing re-started?

The Central Council can put you in touch with the territorial society serving your diocese, who can help you commission a risk assessment to confirm your tower is safe for

ringing. They can also help build a team of ringers to recruit and train your band and provide interim leadership. This may involve an introductory talk to your congregation, followed by a ‘taster’ session to find recruits and a series of training sessions running over 6-12 months. They will also help you to identify a permanent tower captain.

What about noise?

Service ringing rarely leads to complaints and sound control systems installed in many towers substantially reduce noise at other times. Training often uses bells whose clappers are ‘tied’ so that they do not sound. For those towers without sound control, it is good practice to give advance notice of the times of services, practices and performances. The Central Council has a range of resources to support incumbents in the few situations where noise is a problem.



The future of church bell ringing

A Church's bells bring value to its ministry because they speak to all. They are part of our national soundscape. At times of commemoration, celebration or threat, and when calling to service, their unique music has brought people together through shared experience across generations. This inclusivity is reflected in the organisation of church bell ringers, their openness, volunteer culture, willingness to help others and in the

large amounts of time they give to support the church and their community.

With declining church numbers, the future of church bell ringing as a living tradition depends more than ever on welcoming new recruits from non-church backgrounds, particularly young people.

Whilst they have a unique vantage point, ringers also reflect the priorities of society as a whole, meaning that ringing associations regularly revisit matters of safeguarding, insurance and safety.



“Living in a village with six bells and ringers to be seen on the balcony, I called up to the tower captain, “Can anyone do this?” “Yes”, she said, “Tomorrow evening, 7.30 and I’ll teach you”. The rest is history.”

“Ringing is a tradition in peril unless it remains valued by society in this fast, technological age where instant success is expected, and entering a Christian church is unfamiliar.”

“Ringing is intriguing, brings lifelong friendships, ignores age, gender, race, wealth. It engages the intellect, brings a sense of belonging, and reminds the community that Christian worship remains an integral part of our culture.”

Catherine Lane



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www.CCCBR.org.uk/safeguarding

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