



# Volunteering & Leadership Workgroup

## Mission and Activity Paper

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### 1 Workgroup purposes

#### 1.1 Source Material

The 'About the Council' page of the CCCBR Website shows the function of the Volunteering and Leadership Workgroup to be the: "Development of Ringers, Ringing and Leaders". That's a pretty important brief and no small task. There is only so much the CCCBR can do from the centre to achieve this. Historically the development of ringers and ringing has been based on local groups, be they towers or ringing societies. It remains the case that good local leadership and teaching is what underpins the development of ringers and hence ringing. The development of these leaders is based in part on the examples and guidance given by one generation of local ringing leaders to the next and in part from the knowledge and experience individuals gain in their working and personal lives. What the Volunteering and Leadership Workgroup aims to do is to facilitate and provide the resources that support ringers in these development activities throughout their ringing lives.

The Ringers Diary lists the following under Volunteering and Leadership: "Leadership, courses, teaching aids, books, centres, support networks".

According to the CCCBR Website the activities of the Volunteering and Leadership Workgroup are:

- to mobilise bell ringers to create and develop for themselves the teams, knowledge, resources and skills to enable ringing to flourish.
- to promote lifelong learning in ringing both for individuals and teams and the development of support mechanisms for ringers and bands of all abilities.
- to promote excellence in ringing through relevant technical and leadership training.



## 1.2 Grassroots Relevant Concise Purpose

A question I have heard and adapted for our use is: What has the Central Council ever done for us? In fact, the answer is quite a lot; but at the grassroot level, and if you are not concerned about the Method Framework, performance ringing, ringing at other towers, method nomenclature and have no ringers who obviously need safeguarding<sup>1</sup>, the answer might seem “not much”. Indeed, you might have no idea what the Method Framework is. The only method names that concern you are Plain Bob, Grandsire and maybe Stedman and they were standardised long before the CCCBR came along.

The Volunteer and Leadership Workgroup purposes reprised in Section 1.1 above are all fine and good but we need something that concisely says what we are about. It may not answer the ‘What has the Central Council ever done for us?’ question. But it should answer the: ‘What is the Central Council Volunteer and Leadership Workgroup doing for us?’ question. (Note the use of the present continuous form of the verb ‘to do’, for it represents the ongoing challenge of our work.) V&L also needs to inspire.

## 2 Simple Mission Statement

### 2.1 Mission Aim

“We are not going back to the same broken model with low wages, low growth, low skills and low productivity.” (Boris Johnson, Conservative Party Conference, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021). Similarly, too many ringers and ringing communities seem resigned to unrewarding ringing, low growth, low skills, and low amounts of service and other ringing. Perhaps the state of ringing reflects its largely UK social context and what Boris said of the UK economy has infected ringing.

As well as leading to poor quality ringing this is not an environment in which people are going to volunteer in sufficient numbers to share the administrative support load more

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<sup>1</sup> Safeguarding of course covers how we look after every single one of us in a Church setting; not all ringers seem aware of this, which is a separate issue.



widely. Low numbers of volunteers leads to a vicious circle where those that do volunteer are overloaded and subsequently withdraw.

Ringling should be:

- Enjoyable and rewarding for the participants and the normally involuntary audience.
- Growing as a participatory performance art.
- High skilled.
- Producing both service and performance ringling.

## 2.2 Mission Statement

The mission of the Volunteer and Leadership Workgroup is to facilitate and encourage the development of Suitably Skilled and Experienced People (SSEP) to ring, train, lead and support ringling wherever it can take place.

*Note: 'Suitably Skilled and Experienced People (SSEP)' is probably worth deconstructing and contrasting with the Human Resources term 'Suitably Qualified and Experienced People (SQEP)'. For a start we are not a corporate HR Function: we are not selecting people for jobs or promotion, we are not insisting staff complete training packages and we are not disciplining employees. We do need people who are:*

- *'Suitably' able for the role they are taking. They do not all need to be expert ringers, nor to aspire, or to be expected to fill these roles. In many settings an ability to ring call changes well will make them a suitable asset to a band.*
- *'Skilled' recognises that ringling in the English style is a skilled activity with numerous graduations within the craft. We should promote recognising all ringers for their skills whilst allowing a life-times worth of skill development.*
- *'Experienced' recognises that ringling is not mastered overnight; if it ever is fully mastered! Experience is needed to ring well and contribute fully to a band. It is especially valuable in training, leadership and support roles.*
- *'People' addresses diversity: in talent, personality, gender, age, race and social background. Whilst there is much to be done to encourage greater*



*diversity, even now one of the great benefits of being a ringer is the cross-section of people available to ring and socialise with.*

### 2.3 Tag Line

The mission statement leads to the following ‘tag line’ for the Volunteer and Leadership Workgroup:

- V&L WG: the People function of the CCCBR

## 3 Activities

To achieve the mission aim we need to identify and understand what the key Volunteer and Leadership Workgroup activities are and how these map to CCCBR strategic aims.

### 3.1 Intelligence

In order for Volunteer and Leadership Workgroup activities to be relevant to ringers, we need a sound assessment of the state of ringing. As it is ringers who drive the state of ringing, it makes sense that the Volunteer and Leadership Workgroup coordinate the gathering of relevant intelligence which may then form the basis of a brief annual assessment prior to the CCCBR AGM.

Current information is mostly in the form of out-of-date surveys and a range of personnel impressions. We should consider regular specifically targeted surveys perhaps via the CCCBR Affiliated Societies or by direct appeal to ringers. The latter might need sanctioning at the CCCBR AGM. However, surveys are notoriously self-selecting; intelligence needs be gathered before it can be assessed. This gathering takes effort and will never be complete. It involves viewing and listening to what is going on, and interacting with ringers from a wide range of towers and situations. Rather than recruit a large number of ringing spies for this purpose, there are already people who can be asked to add an intelligence reporting function to their roles. This includes local branch education officers, the Ringing and Recovery champions, ART, the Cast of 1000’s and, of course, the officers of the CCCBR. Additionally, a topic on the Ringing Forum could be created. All this will generate raw intelligence.



This raw intelligence will need to be collated and assessed to give an overall picture of the state of ringing. Note that this can only ever be an assessment, a model of what the real world of ringing looks like. It can be challenged for its veracity, but it does need to be accepted as the recognised picture which forms the basis for planning and action.

### 3.2 Train the trainers

The development of sufficient SSEP as ringers depends more on having sufficient Suitably Skilled and Experienced trainers than on having sufficient learners. The total number of course delegates who have attended Association of Ringing Teachers (ART) Day Courses since 2012 is 4,050 as at the end of 2020.<sup>2</sup> Although there is no expectation from ART that all will become an accredited ART Teacher, this is approximately 10% of the ringing population. If all were now actively teaching, this should have provided sufficient trainers even allowing for some retirements and deaths. This does not appear to be the case. The impression is that many attendees have not developed into fully self-confident active trainers, able to teach bell-handling and to develop ringers beyond this point.

As well as ART trainers we should not reject the traditional routes into training that arose simply out of the need to meet demand. We need to develop support for all routes into training. The aim should be to produce a strong cadre of trainers, able to teach initial handling and to guide existing ringers in developing their skills.

### 3.3 Recruit and Retain

Once we assess that there is a sufficient set of skilled trainers available, we can launch a more aggressive recruitment campaign. Meanwhile we need to continue to facilitate recruitment. We need to promote ringing as a skilled traditional activity, with a strong emphasis on mixed ages and a diverse social element, that aims to produce enjoyable ringing performances for both participants and listeners. We need to make it clear that this is both a demanding and rewarding skill that contributes to maintaining both the

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<sup>2</sup> See Roger Booth contribution to page 3 of 'The Median Ringer' Ringing Forum discussion <https://www.ringingforums.org/discussion/78/the-median-ringer>.



physical health and mental agility of participants. This helps to set realistic expectations about the demands of ringing as an activity, which may help to reduce the drop-out rate, particularly among more mature learners.

Retention requires an acceptance of individual aspirations and abilities. There should be the opportunity to take part in satisfying ringing and to develop ringing skills as far as individual talent and lifestyle allow, without pressurising those who are content with their existing level of ringing.

Both recruitment and retention need to cater for the traditional path of learning to ring at a young age, perhaps continuing on to become established Quarter Peal and Peal ringers and the future local, Association and Exercise-wide leaders. It also needs to cater for the more mature learner, perhaps with more modest ambitions and potentially a shorter ringing career, but who nevertheless has much to offer and may increasingly make up the bulk of active grass-roots ringers.

Currently many ringers have returned to active ringing after a dormant period. Such dormant periods are often due to career and family demands. If this is combined with a lack of quality local ringing opportunities then dormant ringers can all too easily become lost to ringing. We need to encourage local ringing leadership to keep the 'ringing room door' open, taking positive steps to keep 'dormant ringers' in touch with ringing, preferably as occasional ringers until such time as their life circumstances change.

We need to promote the concept of nurturing potential ringers from their first contact with ringing onwards. This is a corporate need that may not directly benefit the towers and associations providing the initial training and ongoing support.

### 3.4 Skill Development

The Volunteer and Leadership Workgroup evolved out of the old Education Committee, and supporting skill development must remain a key activity.

There is a plethora of ringing education material in existence. There are many classic texts that are as valid today as when they were written. The talented and keen will find them, make the effort to understand them and learn much from them. However, many



of them appear dry to the modern eyes that are familiar with more approachable teaching materials in various formats. This needs to be addressed.

It is my personal impression<sup>3</sup>, perhaps because I am not based in a major city that:

- The number of knowledgeable tower captains able to teach ringing theory and explain method structure is dwindling.
- Many ringers, including tower captains, would not know how to write out a course of Plain Bob Minor and less would appreciate that doing so helps them understand how a method works in ways that learning a cycle of work, or blue line or even practicing on ABEL, etc will not.
- Tower captains are not likely to ask learners to write out a course of a method for 'homework' if they do not understand it themselves.

There is a need to both provide such knowledge to ringers at all levels but particularly to those teaching learners to ring. We need to work with ART so that both the practical and intellectual skills needed to produce good and interesting ringing are developed.

The delivery and further development of CCCBR run residential courses, such as the new NW course, is of great import. We will learn from running the first course, start planning for a 2023 NW course and also for courses in other areas not already served by existing courses. Doing so in concert with those courses and with local Association training programs will enhance the overall benefit to ringing.

### 3.5 Volunteer enlargement

A number of ringers are doing too many volunteer jobs and many more are not doing any. This risks creating a vicious circle where the many carp at the efforts of the overburdened few, causing the number willing to become, and remain engaged, as volunteers to decline.

Volunteering and leadership roles must be seen as open to all ringers whatever their level of ringing skill and established reputation. Ringers bring a wide range of non-ringing skills with them, which needs to be tapped into. The voice of less expert ringers

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<sup>3</sup> These opinions are ones that I appear to share with other ringers of my vintage I talk to. I was taught in the mid 1960's by an experienced and rather strict tower captain at a village 6, which might explain my views.



from less strong towers needs to be fully represented in CC workgroups if the CCCBR is to be seen as relevant to grass roots ringers.

Ideally it should be possible to provide the organisational effort ringing needs on a one person one job basis. All volunteer roles need to be seen as of equal worth, as rewarding and manageable. To achieve this a sustained effort to recruit and retain more volunteers and leaders is needed. Most ringers recognise that the traditional tower-based model of ringers drawn from well attended parishes with balanced demographics is no longer viable. This means that for ringing to flourish a greater degree of cooperation within ringing is essential. This creates a more demanding organisational model than in the past, requiring constant effort to keep it healthy. The culture within ringing needs to recognise and value the work that all volunteers do in their own time, that they have their own lives lead and the burden needs to be widely shared at tower, Association and National level. The opportunities for personal growth while making a positive and rewarding contribution to ringing should also be emphasized, making the point that volunteering will only be these things if the workload is achievable and matched to ringers' non-ringing commitments. We need a large pool of volunteers!

## 4 Next

Workgroup sub-teams, if not already in existence, need to be established for each of the activities set out above. They should refine and challenge the thinking for their own areas of work. They can then develop, plan and execute ways to achieve their aims.

The Volunteer and Leadership Workgroup Leader will support sub-teams in their endeavours, help to publicise their activities, report to the CCCBR Exec, and lobby for financial and other support if needed. The group will meet approximately at 6 weekly intervals to discuss progress and cross-fertilise ideas across all of the teams.