

Treble Line

For Boys in Church Choirs

Parish Church Choirs with All-Boy Treble Sections

A Short Report on their present situation, recruitment methods and sustainability.

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Executive Summary

- This report contains the results of a survey of Parish Churches that are known to have a choir that contains an all-boy top line ('treble line'). About sixty such choirs are thought to remain in the UK, perhaps only a quarter of the numbers in the early 1980s. In February 2011 questionnaires were sent to the Directors of Music of all these choirs, and replies were received from thirty two (partial information about another was taken from its website). The intention was to find out about the characteristics of those choirs that have proved to be sustainable in an attempt to demonstrate and share good practice; of course, the picture for the choirs that have disappeared may well have been very different.
- Based on these responses, the picture for the surviving choirs with treble lines is, generally, hopeful. For most that gave an answer (19 out of 29) numbers in the treble section had not changed much in the last five years, and another eight had seen an expansion by more than a quarter. Only two had contracted by more than a quarter.
- Almost all the parishes were felt to be appreciative of the choir (only one out of 32 reported a 'mostly') and only two felt that the future was less than assured for the next five years.
- Choirs with treble sections are very diverse, both in their nature and in the environments in which they operate. Respondents reported from 7 to 36 trebles, with a median of 17 boys. Stability of treble numbers was a characteristic of all choir sizes, though the two choirs that had shrunk by more than a quarter in the last five years were both smaller than the median. Most had men singing the lower parts, though two choirs had no men at all. Ex-trebles still at school singing lower parts were common (23 out of 29 choirs had them). Though most of the choirs were all-male, four had women singing alto.
- Some form of payment to trebles was usual (only three out of 32 choirs did not) but sums per boy per month were usually small. The cost to the church was typically less than £5,000 (22 cases out of 30 where information was provided). Perhaps more important, they were active organisations, usually having a range of social events for trebles and a history of trips, some abroad, involving overnight stays, with many deputising in cathedrals.
- Though it is clearly possible for a choir to be sustained under a wide range of circumstances, there are some common characteristics that facilitate this, such as proactive recruiting, an active and varied programme of events, and the provision of an assistant organist/choir director. Perhaps unexpected, the large majority of churches with a treble section also had another choir in which girls or women sang the top line (23 churches had this arrangement, compared to only 7 that did not).
- Recruitment is key to maintaining treble numbers. It is clear that the choirs in the survey were characterised by well-established systems for making contact with potential

singers and retaining them. These make use of a range of techniques, though often a combination seems to be necessary. A proactive approach to visiting schools is clearly important, something easier to adopt where there is a church school. Several respondents indicated that recruiting was most effective when it was apparent to the boy and his parents that the choir was selecting the boy for his potential as a singer rather than the boy selecting the choir.

- Over half of the choir directors reported some difficulty with recruiting in schools. Making contact was not always easy, but issues with gender equality of opportunity had been resolved in many churches by the establishment of a parallel girls/women's choir. Where schools were unsympathetic, this might be overcome by emphasising the benefits to the school by having some of its boys as trained musicians.
- Choir directors were clear that retaining trebles involves making them feel appreciated, giving them the opportunity to achieve, keeping them busy and presenting them with music that challenges at the appropriate level. Rehearsals must be fun and generate a sense of achievement. An active programme helps, often involving tours and cathedral visits. Most choirs have social activities for choristers (25 out of 31). The amount of choir pay seems to be a relatively minor factor in retaining membership; its value seems to be principally as a token of appreciation and achievement.
- There was no obvious link between the present number of trebles and the size of the men's section. Choir men numbers were mostly stable (in 25 out of 29 choirs they had remained about the same over the last five years). Though almost two-thirds of choir directors reported problems with recruiting men, problems with retaining them were not common.
- The personality of the choir director is also important. More than a third (10 out of 28) had been in post at this church for 30 years or more, with one having 54 years of service. All but two of these were aged 60 years and over. It is sometimes thought that this profile should be taken as a warning sign of what may happen when retirement becomes inevitable. However, eight choir directors had been in post for less than 5 years, and six of these were in their 30s or 40s. There was no clear link between the size of the treble section and the length of service and/or director's age.
- To summarise, the choirs whose directors replied appear to be active and systematically organised units that have given thought to what makes a sustainable choir and that act on well-tryed principles. Though the economic, social and religious environment in which they operate is bound to change over time, the basics of maintaining choirs with treble sections are well-illustrated by these choirs.

Introduction

“Treble Line” is an organisation set up for UK parish churches that maintain choirs with top-lines consisting only of boys. The name was adopted at a meeting of interested choir directors held at Charterhouse, London on 5 February 2011 that followed a preliminary meeting held in Reading in 2010. Its aims are to:

- promote and encourage the singing boy in church and liturgical choirs
- support and encourage the all-male choir
- encourage clergy and organists in the running and establishment of such choirs

While “Treble Line” recognises that girls-only, ladies or mixed top lines have an important role to play in parish worship, it believes that the all-boy treble section can bring rather special benefits to its members and more widely. “Treble Line” also gladly acknowledges that the RSCM provides a valuable service in providing support for all types of choir. Nevertheless, it may be helpful for choirs with boys-only top lines to exchange experiences, such as what works in recruiting and maintaining trebles, how they are treated when the voice changes etc..

According to best estimates, there are probably fewer than 60 parish churches in the UK remaining with all-boy top lines (that is, not counting cathedrals and schools). This compares with a much more numerous situation thirty years ago. A survey conducted for the RSCM by the present writer in 1992 (summary results being published in *Church Music Quarterly* of April and July 1983 with the full report on request) found that 12% of affiliated choirs in the UK had a boys-only top line, and 9% were all-male choirs. That survey received responses from 1,200 choirs, considerably fewer than the total RSCM membership at the time (6,438 choir correspondents were listed). Later analysis suggested that the churches returning questionnaires tended to be the more likely to take part in RSCM activities. The upshot is that at least 144 choirs with treble sections were known then to exist, with possibly two or three times this number, depending on how representative were the respondents in 1982. Anecdotal information at a local level supports this decline.

The February 2011 meeting of “Treble Line” proposed, as an early activity, to carry out a survey of churches that operated choirs with a boy-only top line. The intention was to gather basic information that could be used to guide how “Treble Line” should develop. In addition, the questionnaire focused on two issues that appear to be pressing; first, recruitment methods and, second, the profile of choir trainers. Though it might be thought that the supply of boys is the main determinant of whether a treble section is sustainable, at parish level a worrying time is when an established choir trainer retires or moves on.

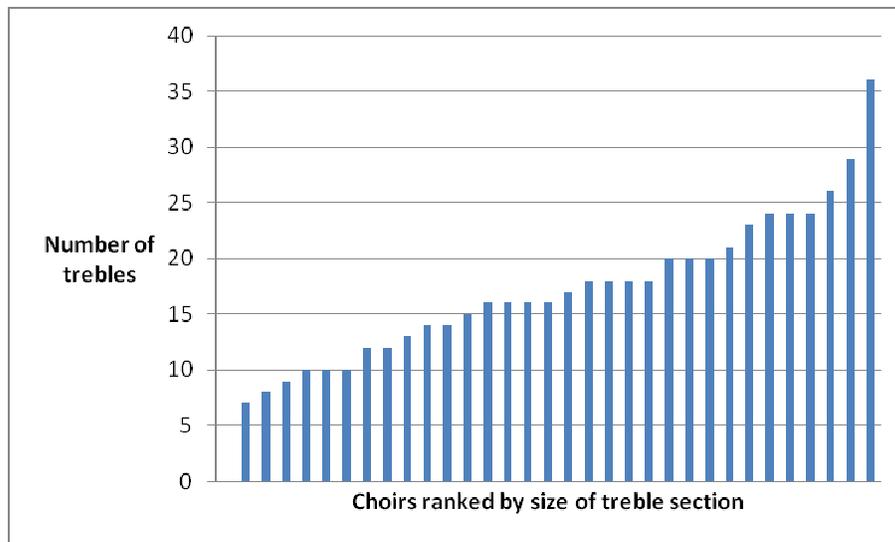
A letter and questionnaire (annexed to this report) were sent on 22 February to as many parish churches with treble sections as could be identified¹, in electronic form where we had e-mail addresses, or by post. A follow-up letter was sent at the end of March, with a final deadline for replies on 15 April. Information was supplied on the understanding that respondents would be happy to see it shared with other Directors of Music. This includes e-mail addresses. Indeed, networking between Directors is seen as a way in which good practice can be shared.

Thirty completed questionnaires were received (not all sections were fully answered by all respondents), and one was partially answered using information on a church website. Only one choir director positively declined to contribute details, a very high-profile choir that had suffered ‘nuisance’ attention to its boys and did not want to make its contact details more accessible. A list of all the churches who responded and a further list of those believed to have treble sections is given as Appendix One. E-mail addresses are provided where known.

Size of treble section

Choir directors were asked the number of boys they had singing treble. Chart 1 shows that this ranged from 7 to 36, with a median of 17 (half the choirs being smaller than this and half larger). The most common size was 18 boys (5 choirs), with four having 16, three with 20 and three with 10. A conclusion is that it seems feasible to run a section of almost any size from a parish church.

Chart 1 Number of boys in each choir responding to survey



Choir directors were asked whether their treble sections had changed size substantially in the last five years. Within this period there will have been a major turnover of boys, so changing numbers

¹ The starting point was a list provided by the Campaign for the Traditional Cathedral Choir. However, it should be clearly understood that ‘Treble Line’ is both organisationally distinct and has a separate purpose from that of the CTCC.

will reflect the effectiveness or otherwise of recruiting strategies. For the purpose of analysis choirs are grouped into small choirs (up to 15 boys), medium (16 to 20) and above 20.

Over two thirds claim that numbers were about the same with, of the others, more declaring an increase than a fall (Table 1). There was no clear relationship with the size of choir, though the only two seeing a fall by more than a quarter were both in the small group. Overall, this suggests that in general responding choirs seem to have recruiting strategies that work – a later section looks at these in more detail. If the next five years is like the last, it seems that there is no immediate prospect of the choir disappearing.

Table 1 Number of choirs by change of size and present size group

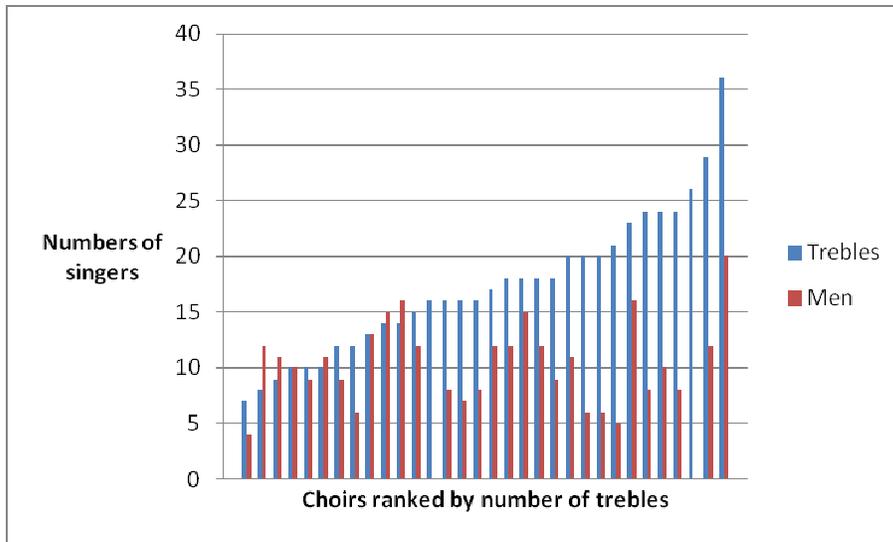
Size of treble section	Expanded by more than a quarter	Remained about the same	Contracted by more than a quarter
Small (up to 15 boys)	2	7	2
Medium (16-20)	3	7	
Large (over 20)	3	5	
All	8	19	2

Under-parts

Ex-trebles with broken voices singing in the ‘back row’ are a feature of these choirs. Of the 29 choirs that gave an answer, 23 had under parts sung by boys still at school. There did not seem to be a relationship with size of treble section in this respect, though the absolute numbers were more likely to be 2-3 among choirs with under 16 trebles and 4-5 in above that number, though three choirs with medium-sized treble sections each had 8 ex-trebles and, among the largest choirs (with over 20 trebles) , one had 9 and another 12 . Such singers are important to the future supply of men, and it is good to record what seems to be healthy numbers.

The picture concerning men singers (not including older boys still at school) was very mixed among respondents. It is certainly not the case that the number of men is proportional to the size of treble section. Two choirs, both of medium size in terms of treble numbers (16-20) had no regular men at all. While the choir with the largest treble section (36 boys) also had the most men (20), one of the two choirs with the next largest men section was in the small treble section category. The lack of relationship is shown in Chart 2, in which choirs are ranked by size of treble section (blue), the number of choir men being shown in red.

Chart 2 Numbers of trebles and numbers of choir men.



An indication was requested of how the number of men had changed in the last five years. The general picture (Table 2) is one of stability, with the large majority of choirs remaining about the same, irrespective of the size of choir (as measured by the number of boys in the treble section)

Table 2 Number of choirs by change of size of men’s section and present treble size group

Size of church’s treble section	Expanded by more than a quarter	Remained about the same	Contracted by more than a quarter
Small (up to 15 boys)	1	10	1
Medium (16-20)	1	8	
Large (over 20)		7	1
All	2	25	2

Of the thirty-one choirs that provided information, only four have women in the back row (two among the choirs with small treble sections and two with medium treble sections). None of the choirs with the largest trebles sections (over 20 boys) had women singers.

Opportunities for girls and women

A somewhat surprising finding is that about three quarters of the churches that have choirs with a boys-only top line also have another choir in which girls and/or women sopranos sing (Table 3). This appears to be common to all sizes of choir (as measured by the treble section). The questionnaire did not differentiate between girls (still at school) and older sopranos, though anecdotal information suggests that often this other choir takes the form of a parallel organisation for girls, providing similar training opportunities to that offered to boy trebles. Some churches run three choirs (one with boys and men, one with girls, and a mixed adult choir).

Reasons mentioned for running a girls choir include the ability to demonstrate equity and better responses by schools to recruitment that provides opportunities for both genders. The extent of contact between boys and girls sections was not explored specifically by the questionnaire, but examples were found where they operate totally separately (perhaps only singing together in an annual event such as Christmas concert) and where the relationship is closer (sharing social events etc.). Examples were found where the men singers combine with both boys and girls sections, and others where this does not take place.

Table 3 Numbers of churches with and without other choirs containing girls/women sopranos

Size of church's treble section	With a girls/women choir	Without a girls/women choir	All choirs
Small (up to 15 boys)	9	3	12
Medium (16-20)	8	2	10
Large (over 20)	6	2	8
All	23	7	30

The implication is that operating a treble section does not usually involve denying opportunities to girls/women. Indeed, it may be necessary to run a parallel choir for girls in order for a treble section to be sustainable. This obviously places demands on the choir director and, to some extent, suggests that a church has to be quite a substantial organisation before multiple choirs become possible, though no doubt exceptions could be found.

Payments to choristers

Payment to the trebles was almost universal. Only three choirs (out of 32 that responded) did not make personal payments, one in the small choir group (1 out of 12) and two among the large choirs (2 of 8 choirs). Thus payment is not a necessary condition for maintaining a treble section. The questionnaire asked for a monthly average, but often information was given about a range (this might have been a better question to ask). There was a wide variation in the sums paid (not including wedding fees); some choirs paid only £1-2 per month per boy, but another one (among the small treble section group) paid up to £30. Most payments, however, were quite modest; where a range was given only 8 of the 26 choirs giving information paid £10 or more monthly to their senior boys. Most choirs appeared to make payments monthly, while a few accumulated some or all of it until the boy retired as a treble or left; the questionnaire did not specifically ask for this information, but it was mentioned anecdotally by some choir directors. It did not prove possible to obtain meaningful data on earnings from wedding fees, though several declared that for the choir to sing at such services was now quite rare.

Views varied among choir directors on the importance of pay as an incentive for recruiting and retaining trebles. In addition to the choirs that did not make payments, a few others felt that it was not a significant factor. Others thought it was useful in stimulating the interest of boys in the early stages of recruitment. Perhaps the importance of making personal payments, which in most churches are small, is because it is a token of membership, of the grade of proficiency achieved, and

of the church’s appreciation of the efforts of their choristers. However, it is also possible not to pay and have a sustainable choir.

Activities and trips

Choir directors were asked about the other activities in which their choirs were engaged, in the following ways:

- if they had any regular social activities specifically for the trebles
- if the choir had gone away as a group involving at least one night away in the last five years;
- if the choir had sung in a cathedral, deputising for its choir, in the last five years;
- if the choir had ever made a trip abroad.

It is clear from the summarised replies (Table 4) that the choirs that responded are very active organisations. More than three-quarters had specific social activities for their trebles, and among the largest 8 choirs this was universal. Two thirds had made trips with overnight stays and a slightly higher proportion had deputised in a cathedral (the categories may often have coincided). There seemed to be little difference between sizes of choirs (as measured by their treble sections). Only with the experience of making a trip abroad did the largest choirs appear relatively more active, with seven of the eight having made such a visit.

Table 4 Choir activities

Size of church’s treble section	Number of choirs	With regular social activities	Trip with overnight stay	Cathedral deputising	Trip abroad
Small (up to 15 boys)	12	9	8	8	5
Medium (16-20)	12	9	8	9	7
Large (over 20)	8	8	6	6	7
All	31	25	21	24	18

Though it is difficult to be sure, the fact that choirs with sustainable treble sections are also so active in the areas mentioned here suggests that these are a factor in explaining their success as musical organisations.

The Choir Director

While the character of the Choir Director is clearly an important factor in the life of the choir, it is too easy to assume that the sustainability of a choir depends on an individual and that the retirement of a long-serving director will lead to collapse. While the time when one leader succeeds

another is a potentially vulnerable one for any organisation, evidence from the survey suggests that dangers can be overcome.

The questionnaire asked about the number of years the present director had been in post at the present church, and the person’s age band. Chart 3 shows their years of service for the choirs ranked by the size of their treble sections. More than a third (11 out of 29) had been in post at this church for 30 years or more, with one having 54 years of service. There was no obvious link with the present number of trebles; five of the 12 choirs with the smallest treble sections had directors in post for 30 years or more, but so had three of the four largest ones. At the other extreme new appointees, with five years of service or less, could be found across the choir size spectrum. Anecdotal information suggested that these had often succeeded post-holders of long standing.

In terms of age of directors, out of every five two were aged 60 years or over, two were in their 40s and 50s, and one was in their 20s and 30s (Table 3). There is a suggestion that small treble sections are associated with older directors and medium ones (16-20 boys) with youngest ones, but this is unlikely to be statistically significant (tests have not been carried out).

With so many choir directors being long serving it is only to be expected that there is a link between age and length of tenure. All but two of those serving 30 years and more at the present church were aged 60 years and over. Of the eight choir directors who had been in post for less than 5 years, and six of these were in the 30s or 40s.

Chart 3 Number of years choir director has been in post, ranked by size of treble section

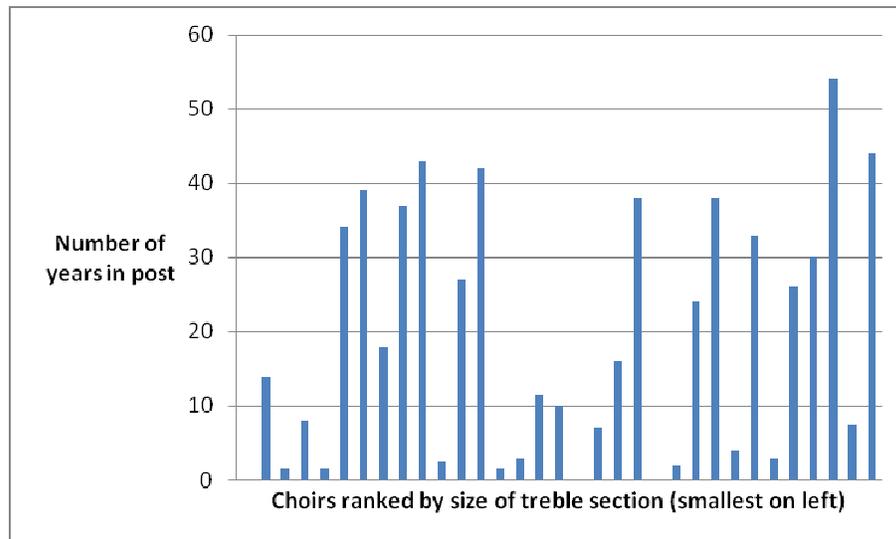


Table 5 Age of choir director

Size of treble section	20-39	40-59	60 and over
Small (up to 15 boys)	2	4	6
Medium (16-20)	3	4	4
Large (over 20)	1	4	3
All	6	12	13

In summary, it is sometimes thought that the age profile of choir directors should be taken as a warning sign of what may happen when retirement becomes inevitable. However, it is clear that it is possible to find treble sections associated with directors of a wide range of ages and lengths of tenure, suggesting that the threat may be exaggerated. Other factors, such as the presence of a robust system for recruitment and a supportive church environment are likely to be more important in determining the treble section's sustainability.

Church support and resourcing

Cost of the choir and provision of an assistant

Most choirs with treble sections cost their churches less than £5,000; this does not include staff costs of the Director. Here there was a relationship with size of treble section; none of the choirs with small treble sections cost more than £5,000, but two in the large choir group cost more than £10,000 (Table 6). Most choirs had separate budgets (20 out of 30) though not having a budget was not confined to small choirs; 3 of the 8 choirs with the largest treble sections did not have a specific choir budget.

Table 6 Cost to the church of the choir

Size of treble section	Less than £5000	£5000 to £10,000	Over £10,000
Small (up to 15 boys)	11	0	0
Medium (16-20)	7	2	0
Large (over 20)	4	3	2
All	22	5	2

In almost all the churches with a treble section (30 out of 32) there was an assistant organist or choir director, the exceptions being confined to the small and medium choirs. Details of what this person did were not explored by the questionnaire, but anecdotal information suggested that the assistant typically played the organ accompaniments. In a few cases the responsibilities of choir director and organist were given to separate people, and sometimes the assistant also trained another choir belonging to the church. However, the general conclusion is that, these days, the provision of an assistant seems to be integral to operating a choir with a treble section.

Appreciation and sustainability

The questionnaire asked whether the church was generally appreciative of the choir with its treble section, and whether the present director felt that the future of the choir was assured for the next five years. All but one of the 32 replies indicated that the parish did appreciate this choir, only one modifying this to a 'mostly'. Anecdotal evidence suggested that in some churches the choir was a major way in which contact was made with young people, and in some cases virtually the only vehicle by which young males were involved with its worship and mission.

A similar clear message came from replies on the prospects for the choir over the coming five years. Almost all directors felt it was assured (30 out of 32 replies), with only one suggesting that it was questionable and dependent on the attitude of the clergy. Of course, this impression does not necessarily apply to churches whose choir directors did not reply. And it would have been instructive to survey those establishments where all-boy top lines have been abandoned in the last few years. But among the surviving churches that responded to this survey the picture is clearly one of optimism for continued sustainability.

Recruitment and retention of choir men

Before turning to the recruitment and retention of trebles, the main concern of this survey, it is convenient at this point to deal with that of choir men. The questionnaire asked about whether the recruitment of choir men presented a problem, whether there was an issue with retaining men and if so what has been tried to resolve the situation. Nothing was asked about what had been tried to improve recruitment, though some choir directors volunteered information.

When ranked by size of treble section, the problem was clearly more serious with the larger choirs (Table 6). Whereas only a third of choirs with up to 15 boys mentioned a problem, all but one of those with more than 20 boys said it was. Bearing in mind the lack of a clear relationship between

size of treble section and number of men, choirs were also ranked by size of men’s section. Here there was another relationship with size. Below 8 men, all the choirs stated that there was difficulty in recruitment. Above that size choirs were evenly split between those for which it was a problem and where it was not, with no clear further relationship with size of men’s section. Clearly this is an issue that may be worth following up at a later stage.

Table 7 Recruitment and retention of choir men

Size of treble section	Number of choirs	Problems with recruitment	Problem with retention
Small (up to 15 boys)	12	4	1
Medium (16-20)	11	8	0
Large (over 20)	8	7	3
All	31	19	4

Recruitment and retention of trebles

Recruitment of boys was a focus of this survey of choirs with all-boy top lines. The following questions were asked:

- How do you recruit your choristers?
- What points do you stress that makes the choir attractive to new trebles?
- What have you found the most successful way to recruit choristers?
- What have you found does **not** work in the recruitment of choristers?
- If you have found obstacles to recruiting in schools, what are they and how have you dealt with them?
- How do you approach the parents of prospective choristers?
- If you have been successful in recruiting choristers, how do you hold on to them?
- Are there specific ways you make the choir attractive from the point of view of new choristers?

Clearly there is some overlap among these questions, and the responses given sometimes related to more than one. A complete listing of the replies from 31 choirs is given as Appendices A and B, in which choirs are ranked according to size of treble section, starting with the smallest. Also shown is whether the choir has maintained its size over the last five years, or expanded or contracted by more than a quarter. Choir directors are encouraged to look at what happens elsewhere as shown in these Annexes; they contain a wealth of detail from which even the most currently successful choir directors should be able to pick up new ideas.

The recruitment process

Appendix A gives responses to questions on the mechanics of the process (methods used, what is particularly successful, what does not work). The most striking aspect of the overall picture emerging is that all these choirs have an active programme for recruitment, using a systemic approach to making contact with potential choristers in schools. In terms of methods, most choirs use a combination of channels of communication, some personal (such as establishing individual contacts with boys and, perhaps more important, their parents) and some impersonal (such as information literature). Visits to schools to publicise the choir was mentioned by 30 out of 32 choirs, though with varying frequency. At one extreme is Bath Abbey which has a Choral Director for Schools on its staff who does regular “choral outreach” in several local schools. Other churches mention regular annual visits to schools, while for others such visits are ‘occasional’. Also almost universal is the use of publicity literature (handouts) describing the positive sides of choir membership. Other communications mechanisms mentioned were posters, articles in parish magazines, press releases, open audition events, radio interviews, production of a DVD, the choir website, cultivating relations with local music teachers, word of mouth and encouraging trebles to recruit siblings. One church invited parents of possible choristers to a Shrove Tuesday choir pancake party; this seemed to be its main recruiting activity. Several choir directors concluded that promoting the choir in multiple ways was necessary, and that no one type of recruiting activity should be relied on.

Beyond making initial contact via schools, many were clear that successful recruiting depends on a certain type of ‘personal’ approach which focuses on demonstrating, to the parents, that their son has a potential to be a chorister and is therefore rather ‘special’ and, to the boy, that he has been selected specially by the choir for his abilities. Auditions can be part of this process; some choir directors audition all children in their local schools; church schools are easier to access, though choir directors often visit other schools. Letters to parents that indicate that their son has been selected for membership and emphasising the benefits to the chorister seem often to bear fruit. Obtaining home addresses of boys from schools can now be a problem, so schools may need to be willing to issue letters to children to take home. Several churches invite parents to attend a practice to observe what goes on – this proves highly effective. Meeting with prospective parents are also common, often with the opportunity to meet other parents.

When asked what does not work in their particular situations, the most commonly cited examples involved ‘impersonal’ lines of communication, such as posters, advertising, magazine articles and the like. However, these may serve a function by giving the choir a profile that the more personal approaches can build on. While ‘open days’ and ‘open auditions’ had worked for some choirs, for others they had been notable failures (which can also be demotivating for existing trebles if few or no-one turns up).

Views differed on how to turn initial enthusiasm and attendance into firmly committed membership. Some churches have junior treble sections. Some choirs use a gradual introduction to singing duties whereas others immerse newcomers into the full range of choir services and rehearsals from the outset (this probably reflects the age at which recruiting starts).

Relationships with local schools

Given the key role of schools in the recruitment process, it is worth examining the relationship between the choir director and the schools that are seen as containing potential choristers. The questionnaire asked if obstacles had been found to recruiting in schools, what they were and how they have been dealt with.

Of the 32 choir directors who replied, just under half (14) found schools supportive and did not report any difficulties. However, the rest had problems; these are listed (lightly edited) below (see Figure 1).

Most of the comments are from separate choir directors, and they come from across the spectrum of choir sizes. Certainly, the choirs with large treble sections (over 20 boys) are not immune, with 5 of the 8 reporting difficulties. Where there is a church school of adequate size to supply all the trebles, problems are likely to be few. But many choirs draw recruits from several schools, and not all may be easy to access. A few directors wrote voluminously, covering several points, and such contributions have been split. In this report names of churches and of choir directors have been removed from comments, though these can be identified in the sources material.

Difficulties encountered fall into four groups:

- Difficulty in making contact with schools
- Gender issues
- The school's unhelpful attitude
- Other issues (often local).

The key to solving the first, identified within the responses, seems to be to make personal contact by a phone call or visit.

Objections which schools may have had to recruiting for a boys-only top line has been countered in many churches by the establishment of girls choirs. The widespread co-existence of choirs with boys and a girls/women's choir has already been noted. Setting up a parallel girls choir may bring other advantages. One choir director notes that 'there is ample evidence for us that a separate girls' choir encourages the boys' choir (and vice versa)'.

Where the school is unhelpful because of the attitude of its staff and governors, choir directors face a more formidable task. While abandonment is an option, and may ultimately take place, one choir director suggested that a change in approach by the choir director might be helpful.

'Heads with their own inbuilt prejudices ... can be difficult to get past, but in my experience, many choir directors shoot themselves in the foot with this, by thinking only about what they want from the school. This is diametrically, 100%, the wrong approach. In selling anything, it's about what the customer wants: and therefore it's vital to think about what the choir might bring to the school in terms of its ethos, public profile, ability to tick certain boxes for its music-making etc.'

Though expressed in relation to attitudes of head-teachers to religion, it would appear to be equally applicable if the main ground of objection is some other issue of interest to the school or its staff.

Better trained singing boys can contribute to the school's musical standards, to its record of self-discipline and motivation, even to academic records through generally improved cognitive functioning. Perhaps by stressing these positive and externalised benefits easier access may be obtained.

Figure 1 Comments where difficulties have been encountered with schools.

<i>Difficulty making contact with schools</i>
I have in the past written to every single primary head-teacher in the county with no response. Contact is best made via chorister parents with a boy at that school or via the visiting music teacher.
Writing to schools is ineffective; some just don't reply. It is better to telephone or go in person to make initial contact; all contact need following up (often several times!). It helps if you have one or two boys from a school who have been reluctant (e.g. I approached a secondary school and they had no interest whatsoever, but when one of the boys moved to that school I was able to mention this and their view seemed to change).
Getting the right contact can be difficult - still not into one school after two years
<i>Gender issues</i>
One school is concerned with equality - other not
Boys only an issue in one school. Some allow us in, others take literature
It is not always possible to talk to just boys, but sometimes
Making sure we can talk to the girls as well as the boys, but on separate occasions
In the early 1990s we found it very difficult to gain support for boys only so began the girls' choir (which seemed a good idea anyway). Equal opportunities are therefore now never an issue, and there is ample evidence for us that a separate girls' choir encourages the boys' choir (and vice versa).
Our efforts to target only male pupils for a highly specialised activity is probably viewed by to Head Teachers, Music Co-ordinators and Governors to be incompatible with meeting the demands of their roles (although nothing is said openly), hence they are likelier to allow us access if we can demonstrate that our activity will benefit all pupils. Also, given the extreme limits on space for extra-curricular activity in many schools' Timetables, it is a logistical nightmare for schools to have to separate Boys from Girls in order to attend a workshop or set of auditions. The only way around this problem has been to hold workshops for entire year groups, or assemblies for entire schools (Boys and Girls combined)... previously we have provided information about local Girls' Choirs. In 2011 we are forming a separate Girls' Choir for the Church, so that we can advertise for Girls in our own right!
<i>School's unhelpful attitude</i>
School's view was 'we don't think any of our boys would be interested' This was overcome by a letter distributed to parents
Heads with their own inbuilt prejudices towards religion can be difficult to get past, but in my experience, many choir directors shoot themselves in the foot with this, by thinking only about what they want from the school. This is diametrically, 100%, the wrong approach. In selling anything, it's about what the customer wants: and therefore it's vital to think about what the choir might bring to the school in terms of its ethos, public profile, ability to tick certain boxes for its music-making etc.
Very difficult, they are not anti, but do not encourage choir membership because it is religious. We try to get parents of existing boys to talk to other parents when opportunities arise.
One school told the parent of a new chorister the it was illegal to have a boys only choir.
Dealing with private prep schools is a problem.
A handful of schools are very supportive and welcoming: choirmaster is allowed to select boys by auditioning in school. A couple of others would only allow talks and distribution of literature; we don't use them.
One or two schools have refused us access on the grounds that they are in preparation for their own musical activities and do not want to confuse the children; others have even said they feel it is inappropriate for us to recruit children for our Choir as they already have choirs of their own and that (as far as they can see) there is nothing we can provide, other than the experience of singing weekly in Church services, that they do not already get as part of being in those school choirs. There is also an insecurity about the fact that we are a Church organisation; some schools are reluctant to let us in because they suspect that our success will result in the loss of young people (or whole families) at their nearby churches. (Or perhaps they feel that such children and their parents would not want to join us on the grounds of prior commitment to their own local church, and that we would be wasting our time even trying to recruit!)
Dealing with this problem involves a degree of cunning! In some cases, we have found that it is possible to sneak in anyway via the endorsement of members of staff In one case, we even found that an initial rejection could be turned into an acceptance, through gentle persistence and dealing directly with the Music Co-ordinator rather than the Head. In one or two cases, sadly, we have had no choice but to abandon our attempts, since the schools clearly do not want us there.
It is useful for me to be Chairman of the Governors of our local church school. Other schools are far more difficult to get into – the neighbouring parish's Aided school would not let me issue recruiting brochures even though that parish does not have a boys choir. <u>Something to do with breaking up church families</u> We have started a girls choir to avoid gender issues. ,
Some head teachers can be very unhelpful... In several schools I have been told "none of our children would be interested in that" – which I think is appalling, a school should be providing opportunities for its students and then the child / parents should make a decision as to whether they are interested in any given activity. When this is the case, I usually just abandon that school, as, if the head teacher is unsupportive there's nothing you can do! It's a shame, as some children may miss out, but nothing can be done if you can't get access to the school.
<i>Other issues</i>
Child protection issues make schools reluctant to let the boys tell me where they live so I am not able to visit families as I used to do. This has made things more difficult but I now enclose a stamped addressed envelope with the letter which encourages some to reply (About a quarter)
Our biggest problem is that we have the cathedral 100 yards away who are recruiting mainly from the same pool. Certain

schools favour the cathedral and don't give us a look in.
Offered to take school choir rehearsals (2 choirs now)

The fourth group is rather miscellaneous, to which no general remedy seems possible. While data protection means that a school will not give out addresses of children, they will often allow letters to be taken home by boys who have been identified as potential recruits, on which parents may act.

Things that appeal to choristers and parents – recruitment and retention

Beyond the mechanics of recruitment, another aspect the questionnaire explored was what motivates a boy to join (or his parents to send him) and what keep him interested as a member of the choir. This survey did not ask the boys themselves, or their parents, but asked Choir directors what points they stressed that they felt made the choir attractive to new trebles. The replies (see Annex B) display a wide range of approaches. Some lay weight on what an adult might see as the benefits from choir membership (free training in musicianship, life-skills, team building abilities etc.) while others are more down-to-earth (fun, social activities, trips and pay).

There is more consistency in opinions on how to hold on to recruits (retention) and the specific things the choir directors have done to make the choir attractive to choristers. Factors commonly mentioned were that rehearsals must be involving, engaging and 'fun'. There must be opportunity for boys to see themselves making progress and achieving results in a progressive way; the RSCM training schemes (old and new) and ribbon awards, often modified for local conditions, were frequently mentioned as being useful in this respect. Choir director must be able to show appreciation of the efforts of each boy and make choristers feel 'special' and engaged in a worthwhile activity. The music must present challenges and the work load must be demanding, with rehearsals appropriately planned. Trips, tours and cathedral visits add to this sense of achievement and pride in choir membership. Several mentioned the need to be realistic in terms of the demands on family time so as to avoid unnecessary conflicts. For many choirs, social events and choir clubs were mentioned. As noted above, while personal payments feature among the list of things mentioned as relevant to retention, the non-pecuniary factors seem far stronger.

The aspects of the choir that attract boys and bind them in are very closely aligned with how choir directors 'sell' the choir to parents. Appendix B shows that choir directors use typically a more mature articulation of the things they stress when recruiting boys, in particular the fact that choristers receive a free professionally-based education in music and develop life skills. Some mention the indirect impact in terms of better performance in non-musical subjects at school and related enhanced prospects in secondary education. A few directors mentioned parents being resistant to the message and their suspicions about what went on in churches. Several choirs cited examples of how they try to involve parents in choir life, including not only newsletters and regular meetings of parents but also by getting them to assisting with or participating in choir social events. However, this active engagement with parents was only mentioned by a minority of choir directors.

Clearly, the directors of the choirs surveyed are pursuing strategies that are successful in their particular circumstances. They are practising what has been advocated by experienced choir directors (such as John Bertalot) and the RSCM for decades. Indeed, there is much in common with good staff management in any type of organisation. The principles of maintaining engagement, the

opportunity for achievement, and presenting choristers with musical challenges that stretch them clearly work in practice. But they constantly need reinterpretation as circumstances change, and for choirs with treble lines to be sustainable their directors need to be willing to respond. As one choir director put it:

‘For me, the secret to recruitment and retention lies in understanding the changes, especially those affecting boys, that have happened within our society and culture as a whole since the mid-20th century and adapting to them – perhaps not entirely, but enough that we can meet children and parents somewhere between their terms and ours.

Appendix A: Responses to questions on recruiting methods.

Church	Trebles	Change	How do you recruit your choristers?	Most successful method (in your circumstances)	Not found effective
All Saints, Litcham	7		Visits to schools followed by a handout giving contact details.	Some boys are active recruiters; others keep a low profile outside the choir. Talking to parents at 'open' school functions and get support from Headteacher.	Holding an Open Day. Boys themselves are NOT generally effective in recruiting.
Doncaster Minster	8	a	Visits to schools, information, open auditions, press release.	School visits and present choristers bringing friends.	Not much success with 'Be a chorister for a day'.
St Mary, Swansea	9	c	Advertising, magazine articles, school visits etc.	School visits	Writing letters to head teachers Writing in the parish magazine
St Thomas, Stourbridge	10	c	Relationship with nearby school which is primary source of recruitment; information leaflets given out at young people's music events in church; advertisements in local paper; choir website; regular press releases about choir activities sent to local media	'light-touch' audition (which, unknown to them, all auditionees pass – it is, after all, my job to teach people to sing so there is no reason to reject anyone), following which they attend the following Tuesday practice (strike while the iron is hot). Parents still place value on the idea that their son has "passed an audition" and makes them more keen to be involved. The sooner new boys are put in a cassock, singing for a service, the sooner they start to 'get' what we're about.	The "gentle" introduction" to the routine doesn't work and, indeed, simply confuses parents as to the actual level of commitment required. It's best for them to hit the ground running, attending both weekly practices and the two Sunday choral services from day one. The 'softly, softly' approach doesn't work either: it's best to be totally open

				And it's important that they should experience the element of 'performance' as soon as humanly possible. Typically, it would be learning one hymn – so that they are 'observers' for most of a service but have at least one opportunity to sing part of something they have prepared during the preceding week.	about the level of commitment required and let people make a decision to join, or not, at the outset. That discourages many, but it ensures that those who do come understand the demands of what they are there to do – and avoids problems developing with attendance/punctuality etc.
Emmanuel, Wyldes Green	10	b	Information sent to schools, occasional school visits when possible, undertake an annual singing day on a Saturday. The big challenge is i) two rehearsals per week and ii) the clash with Sunday sporting activities. This has contributed to a smaller treble line of late	The singing day has produced good material. We have started a bursary scheme to help with music lessons and a few such "scholarships" have We have to follow up all leads. eg. A girl chorister's parent has a brother who likes singing, or a boy comes along to a singing day with potential but needs encouragement been started	.
St Nicholas, North Walsham	10	a	Boys from Sunday School, boys bring their friends	Personal contact	Advertising, magazine articles etc.
Dunstable Priory	12	a	Response: visits to schools; incidental nabbing of boys and parents in congregation [proportionally, this is the most successful means].	Choosing them –rather than them choosing you. Almost all boys that stay come from (a) choirmaster approaching boy and parent after service and requesting immediate audition – they are in before they know it; (b) audition in school – letter to parent then congratulates them	General talks to year groups in schools: initial interest + take up of info. leaflets does not translate into parents 'opting in' and making contact, other than very occasionally General advertising.

				on offer of a place (parent then has to opt out rather than opt in); (c) personal approach to family from other choir parent or choirman	
Holy Trinity, Ilfracombe	12	a	At local church school auditions for years 4 and 5 each year in September.	As on left.	Advertising in local papers.
Holy Trinity, Cookham	13	a	Visits to schools, information leaflets, open auditions.	Pew News, parish magazine, local paper. Friends (and siblings) of trebles and girl choristers. Encourage parents to come to hear the choir.	Endless carping about the need for choristers.
Holy Trinity, Southport	14	a	School visits, information leaflets.	Invitation to parents to a short meeting/talk giving dull details of the choir and giving opportunity for questions.	
St Mary, Bury St Edmunds	14	b	From anywhere. Visits to schools, appeals in local papers, cultivating links with local teachers, word of mouth, children's church,	Word of mouth, school visits and most important cultivating relationships with teachers. The personal invitation is by far the best.	Articles in the paper seem to produce little response, if any.
St Mary the Virgin, West Derby	15	a	Largely from the adjacent church school. Choir is self-advertised – boys have friends who are choristers.	Voice test / contact parents / meeting / trial period. All of years 4 and 5 are tested, unless parents ask that this does not happen.	
Holy Trinity, Kendal	16	c	Be a Chorister events - usually morning sessions although one in February 2009 was an all-day event. These are usually "prepared for" by visiting local schools to deliver workshops / singing	First of all, I have learned that "gently does it!" Younger boys are expected to come via the Junior Choir, wherein we can provide musicianship training via games and engaging methods, most notably the Kodaly solfège and hand signal	Treating them like professionals from the outset – such an approach may be effective in Cathedrals, especially those with Choir Schools where the Boys "have to be there"

		<p>assemblies, and providing the schools with invitation leaflets to send home to parents. (In the past we have accompanied these invitations with letters commending particularly outstanding Boys, but this practice ultimately proved very difficult to manage since the schools understandably feel a need to audit our letters before sending them home, and in any case it was logistically harder than sending one leaflet for all.) We have also founded a Junior Choir to provide a vehicle for younger candidates, giving them an initial training in musicianship pitched at a more suitable level for 5-9 year olds, with a few performance opportunities each year. Having suitably whetted the appetites for singing of these younger Boys, we can then invite them into the main Choir as they reach a suitable level of musical and emotional maturity.</p> <p>This past month (February 2011) we have attempted a different approach to recruitment by working with a</p>	<p>techniques. Performances happen only once a month at most - just enough for them to get a feel for singing in public (and in Church) but not so much that they are overwhelmed or stretched beyond their means. Throughout this process the Boys are made constantly aware that there is an "older Choir" in which they could receive pay and other benefits, so that they have an incentive to work towards moving up into that Choir; this, coupled with developing a love of singing, can help us to persuade parents - via the Boys themselves - to make the greater commitment when their sons come of age.</p> <p>In the case of older Boys, "gently does it" applies by easing them into the experience, firstly by only requiring them for one practice per week over a period of up to two months so that their appetites can be whetted without any obligation. All being well, as they see that the other Boys are more heavily involved (and realise that heavier involvement equates to more pay and more time with new friends), they begin to ask if they can come more often and (we hope!) apply the right kind of pressure on their parents.</p>	<p>anyway, but it is not appropriate in our remote middle-class provincial environment.</p> <p>Holding "open days" whereby we simply show and tell parents and Boys what our Choir is like, etc. I find that in this decidedly secularised era we live in, parents are not enthused by the fact that we are a Church Choir and Boys need some sort of hands-on experience of singing that is more fun than singing Church Music, even if it is high quality music from the core of the Anglican repertoire.</p> <p>Auditions – given that even Cathedrals find candidates coming forward for Voice Trials who have enormous musical potential but no interest in becoming Choristers, we would be foolish to even attempt it in our situation. (Our Junior Choir enables us to "weed out" those who might not cope as full Choristers later on, in any case.)</p>
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			number of local primary schools to put on a Musical in Church, it is too soon to appraise this event's success, but there has already been some interest from pupils and parents, who were provided with literature about our Choirs in their programmes or the night.		
Hexham Abbey	16	a	Very occasional school visits, c leaflets, website, word of mou	No easy answers; it's always hard work. Most can see the merits of the choir, but are ever more & more reluctant to commit.	
Reading Minster	16	a	Visits to schools and cubs groups, information leaflets, website, choir open day once per year – children sing together, go up the tower and onto the roof of the Minster All boys take a voice trial and then those selected stay on a term probationary period We are also about to setup a facebook and Utube page	Inviting them to an open day (or rehearsal) to see if they enjoy it first of all Getting the other boys to introduce their friends Keeping links with schools by taking the boys in to sing and talk about their experiences	Writing to schools – better to telephone or go in person to make initial contact or some just don't reply. All contact needs following up (often several times!)
St Mary-le-Tower, Ipswich	16	a	Open evenings; auditions; visits to schools; word of mouth.	No one way – it seems to be a mix. Best of all when they hear by word of mouth, perhaps with a recommendation from a singing teacher at school.	The results of all our efforts are so random that I would not rule out anything.
St John the Baptist, Chipping Barnet	17		Parental contact/recommendation to new parents; family service and congregation.	Invitation to annual Shrove Tuesday choir pancake party (in school/parental contacts usually). Recruiting through schools only	Vague requests. Overstressing the entire commitment!

			Word of mouth.	successful if through existing parental contacts.	
St Thomas a Canterbury, Brentwood	18	a	From our church primary school: our Sunday School and church families: information leaflets: encourage existing choristers to bring their friends	Not any one way – a combination of T1 items above	None
Holy Trinity, Guildford	18	a	Posters, leaflets, word of mouth, schools – anything and everything.	Word of mouth, and families of the choir, and via existing families of the church.	Pressure, of any kind. Auditions; ‘cold calling’.
All Saints Collegiate, Maidstone	18		Visits to primary schools (I run two school choirs). Boys in the choir recruit friends. Advertising on the choir/church website. Choir recruiting literature.	A combination of all the methods listed on left.	Introducing too many new boys at the same time.
Romsey Abbey	18	a	Local school auditions for Year 3	Going into local schools	Advertising
St Leonard, Hythe, Kent	20	c	Visits to church school, word of mouth. Recruiting leaflets for boys (and equivalent one for girls).	School auditions – I listen to all Year 5 and 6 boys and girls in the church school and offer about 6 places in the choir each year. Letters are sent to parents indicating that their child has potential and would benefit in many ways. Other boys come via word of mouth, and relationships with teachers in other schools. The personal invitation works. Brothers often bring brothers.	Articles in the paper. Open days.
Christchurch Priory	20	c	Some visits to schools, with information leaflet, but word of mouth more	Getting them to tell others. Educating parents! Word of mouth currently snow-balling	

			effective.	membership; waiting list now being created. Taking choristers with me to schools is VERY effective – the're keen to demonstrate.	
Bridlington Priory	20	a	Talk in schools (information leaflets given to boys to take home). Auditions in school about a week later.	This is the only method I have used	
St George, Belfast	21	c	Visits to schools (I see on average 200 7/8 year old boys at the start of each academic year) Information leaflets – in church, schools, music schools Press releases / radio interviews	it's recruiting the PARENTS that is important! PERSONAL letters to parents are the best way (ideally telling them how talented their child is and what a great opportunity singing in a church choir would be!) Emphasise the FREE musical education, the development of skills, confidence, independence and team work, which transfer beneficially to other musical activities and school work	Open auditions – have tried a couple of times and got a very poor response.
St Peter & St Paul, Chingford	23	a	From within the congregation Word of mouth by members to friends / relatives etc Through public events such as concerts and the associated publicity on programmes etc. Contact all local schools annually including circulation of a promotional DVD Personal recruiting visits to our church school (though local prep schools tend to	The promotional DVD	General advertising on posters, though it should not be ignored just in case!

			be more successful)		
Croydon Minster	24	c	Visits to schools, word of mouth, referrals	Fostering links with our local Parish Church School and offering my time/skills to them	Dealing with private prep schools
St Mary & St Nicholas, Spalding	24	a	Visits to schools, information leaflets Invitation to Choir Club (social activities) followed by a short sing (often secular songs initially)	Visit schools with an open invitation to come along to Choir Club and see what we do! Ask other trebles to bring along a friend.	Attending a full schedule of rehearsals and services too soon after 'joining'.
Bath Abbey	24	a	Visits to schools and through our Choral Director for Schools who does regular "choral outreach" in several local schools	Having a member of the Abbey music department working in schools	Visiting schools once a year and talking to members of a class/choir/year group/assembly, talking about concerts/trips/tours etc
St Mary the Virgin, South Elmsall, Pontefract	26	a	Visits to local schools (5 or 6). Seeing year 3 or 4 boys as groups of volunteers alone. This is very important. Boys in our part of the world are reluctant to volunteer if girls are present. There is a culture that singing is for girls. (rather like the Billy Elliott syndrome). I take a current choir photograph in which boys from their school can be recognised and a letter for parents for the volunteers to take home.	See previous answer	Just an advert in the church magazine or local paper.
All Saints Collegiate, Wolverhampton	29	c	Visiting schools (and having a son of my own in the choir). Personal letters as a follow-up.	PERSONAL letters to parents are the best way (ideally telling them how talented their child is and what a great opportunity singing in a church choir would be!)	Open auditions – have tried a couple of times and got a very poor response.

St John Baptist, Broughton	36	a	Annual visit to three local junior schools, two of which are Church Schools.	Visit involves a 45 minute 'sing' with two separate groups; yr 3 & yr 4; DVD shown of Choir activities; parents contacted through school. Supply each promising boy with a copy of the Choir recruitment leaflet	Parish magazine advertisement

APPENDIX B Responses on what makes a choir attractive and able to retain.

Church	Trebles	Change	Attractions to boys	Retention (boys)	Specific actions found to be attractive	Attractions to parents	Involvement (parents)
All Saints Litcham	7		Something special for boys.	Get them involved. Older boy mentors in practices. Mix of music (including plainsong).	Choir club, activities, camps, adventure	As for boys.	Talk to parents at receptions (especially those looking for something other than football)
Doncaster Minster	8	a	Choir pay , social activities, musical education	Make rehearsals fun; plenty of social events. Talk regularly to the choristers.		Free musical education; social skills for choristers; new friends.	Director always makes himself known. One-to-one conversations about concerns.
St Mary, Swansea	9	c	Specialist training, life skills, choir visits, social events, opportunity to sing with other boys.	Pocket money incentives , social activities, a good turn round of music, Voice for Life	Opportunity to sing for other boys, the social aspect, pocket money, prestige of singing at special events,	Specialist training, only such choir in area; life skills; high profile events as the civic church for City and County of Swansea, radio broadcasts; cathedral visits; RSCM Voice for Life	
St Thomas, Stourbridge	10	c	Proven benefits of singing in relation to overall academic achievement; opportunities to make new friends; fun	We use the RSCM Voice for Life scheme, and from day one, they are working towards their introductory “White Level”. This is usually achieved within three to four weeks and gives them an immediate sense of achievement. They’re usually focused only on one	Offering young people something of a high standard that is not normally expected of them in mainstream education. They appreciate the challenge, and the clear boundaries and	We point out that their boys are receiving a high level of professional tuition for free. We accent the career success of former choristers and explain why the ethos of the choir instils these basic skills for life. We sell the	We have a meeting for new parents where they get to see some of the work that happens, have a chance to ask questions and have the choir’s day-to-day routine and life explained to them. They are automatically enrolled in our “Friends of

				thing after that: achieving the Light Blue level.	expectations that are set, and aspire to achieve them	educational benefits.	the Music” and are therefore very much engaged in the choir’s life from day one.
Emmanuel, Wylde Green	10	b	Improved academic success through such an activity; working as a team, and developing their musicianship and confidence. They like the idea of getting paid though that small amount is never going to be something to hold a disinterested youngster.	They have to need to be part of this activity. They learn to value to standards we seek to maintain and realise their role in doing so. They have to have interesting rehearsals and develop a loyalty to the conductor. They have to seem to be valued. They are part of a chorister training scheme which is a more straightforward version to that of the RSCM (possibly based on an earlier model) they enjoy passing the tests and ultimately gaining promotion.	We do an annual weekend at York Minster, I stress the fact that the choir does not sing during half-terms or school holidays (except for Easter and Christmas and this now helps with the recruitment.	Covered on left. They hear them singing and hear a different sound from that of many school choirs. They meet older choristers- the older boys who mentor a new one, the younger men of the choir, the see the enthusiasm and loyalty to the set up. They are fearful about such aspects as a foreign tour (we regularly go to France and are linked with a Boys Choir in Germany and go there too sometimes) BUT once a youngster has experienced one of these his place in the choir is all the stronger from his point of view.	Chat to them of the values of learning music, speak of my own School Music dept which is large, has a music scholarship programme, and some 50 doing A level (a state school).
St Nicholas North Walsham	10	a	Social activities	Building team spirit and stressing the importance of their roll in the church.	The social side including the weekly boys club with computer games, snooker, table tennis, football etc.	Educational benefits. Social activities, The only opportunity to belong to such a choir in the county outside the Cathedral.	
Dunstable	12	a	‘Come along and try	Initial probationer rehearsal	Need to feel they are	Letter +leaflet stress	

Priory			for a few weeks' coupled with prospect of being paid! Hook them in first –then add to weekly commitment bit by bit so both boy and parents don't feel overwhelmed + boys feel that they are succeeding and progressing	of 25 mins followed by 20 mins with other boys – exercises and then simple music already looked at in probs. rehearsal. The aim for probationer period [c. 5 months] is that they should leave each rehearsal feeling that they've improved –I usually ask them to say what they've learned/got better at each week. . Training cards get ticked off as they learn specific skills in music-reading & theory and voice production. Cards also make clear when they are ready to join 2 nd rehearsal on the Friday, Sunday mornings and, lastly, Sunday evenings. Times to socialise with other boys are important [computer games do have their uses!!	taking part in something worthwhile, and that they are being asked –at whatever level they are at within the choir-for a contribution the is a] challenging but b] achievable. Our training scheme is similar to RSCM 'SING ALOUD' -and boys go on to Diocesan Awards and Gold Award- so there is always something to work for. The 'Singing Week,' staying away, in the summer holiday Is important in further 'hooking them in'.	increase in –self-confidence, concentration, reading ability, ability to work with others + concept of commitment and putting the needs of the group ahead of one's own. Then professional singing and music theory tuition –free of charge is highlighted.	
Holy Trinity, Ilfracombe	12	a	Joy of music; hand-picked for special talent; work together as a team; choir pay.	Being enthusiastic about what a service to the community they are. Evenings out.			
Holy Trinity, Cookham	13	a	Musicianship; part of a good group.	Avoid pomposity. Interesting, encouraging services and practices. Much praise. Fun.			Encourage parents to come to church.
Holy Trinity, Southport	14	a	Improved concentration; best possible musical training; great place to make friends; amazing	Good communication between choir and parents.	Monthly pay , tuck shop, social events, cathedral singing week.	See what makes the choir attractive to boys.	Invitations to short meetings/talks. Giving full details about the choir, with opportunities for questions.

			team work.				Get parents involved with social events.
St Mary, Bury St Edmunds	14	b	That they're joining something very special that can trace it's roots back to 1300. I stress foreign visits, visits to cathedrals, weddings, Choir camp, television and radio work. I do mention pay , but that seems not very relative somehow.	It really depends on how they get on with the other boys. If they have a friend in the choir that helps enormously. Fortunately my lads are very welcoming.	By choosing music which challenges them and by making practices fun.	As for boys. I also stress the valuable educational contribution. eg. Improved reading skills, better musical skills, learning commitment	
St Mary the Virgin, West Derby	15	a	They know other boys in school who are trebles	They work hard, produce reasonable results and there's some fun too.	Theatre/film visits; holidays in Wales; fun activities.		They know other choir parents.
Holy Trinity, Kendal	16	c	We have a Choir Club Room available for use once a week by all the boys, equipped with computer games, board games, a pool table, electric car racing track and dart board. We also emphasise payment for singing , social trips and the opportunity to make new friends.	Obviously, the Choir Club sessions and promise of termly (or twice-annual) social events or trips is a major hook. Ensuring that Choir Practices are fun and rewarding helps to develop their enthusiasm for the experience, as does selecting the best possible repertoire for performance within the limits of the Choir's overall capabilities. An extremely effective means of retention has been to reduce the commitment we expect of the Boys over the course of an entire week. Now the Boys sing at only one of the two Sunday services, using	Aside from the aforementioned Club Room, the system of payment is based upon seniority achieved not through age but through attainment. We use a training system based heavily on the RSCM's Voice for Life programme. Additionally, Boys compete every year for Head Choristership and other "positions" within the Choir that have higher "stipends" attached; there are also weekly bonuses available for	We follow through on recruitment drives by calling parents afterwards, praising their sons' abilities on the day and giving them our opinion that Choir might be something very good for their sons. Some parents are sceptical, and others say that whilst their sons enjoyed the experience of the day, they do not feel that a full-time commitment to our activity would be enjoyed or even feasible due to other commitments. Gentle persuasion is sometimes possible, but	

				a bi-weekly rotation to ensure that they sing for at least two Eucharists and two Evensongs every month. This has helped to retain almost every Boy who has joined us over the last year, but has also been controversial amongst some of the Congregation and the Choir Men,	outstanding behaviour, performance and commitment. As Director of Music, I make every effort to offer praise and credit where it is due, thus building a rapport with the Boys who are in turn keen to demonstrate loyalty and better performance.	persistence is not always effective. Mindful that some parents have problems with the Church aspect of our organisation, or may already be members of other churches, we set out the educational, social and financial benefits. Interestingly, the Boys themselves are often better at “selling” the Choir than I am: a good handful of the current Boys joined the Choir as a result of persuasion by their friends already in it, backed up by recommendations amongst their parents.	
Hexham Abbey	16	a	Fun, free musical education, prestige, tours, recordings, choir pay , self-discipline, friendships	Very difficult; there has to be interest, a sense of importance within the choir. forthcoming kind. and choir pay sometimes	as on left	As for boys plus free music prestige, tours, recordings, discipline, friendships. Ms merits of the choir, but are reluctant to commit.	
Reading Minster	16	a	Social activities e.g. laser quest, bowling, football matches with other choirs, trips away in the summer, pocket money , free music theory and singing lessons	Rehearsals are fun and the boys enjoy them – I do a Chorister of the week certificate which they respond to well and a social event every month – they really enjoy this aspect of	Social activities, free musical education, trips away and pay	Social benefits – meeting and working with boys from across the area Educational benefits – free music theory lessons, opportunity to take theory exams and learn about	I have a social for parents at the start of each term – which gets new parents to meet existing ones so they can find out more.

			Scheme whereby if a current chorister introduces a boy and they remain in the choir for two terms or more that boy receives a £20 bonus	the choir		music Musical benefits – free singing lessons and opportunity to take singing exams and other awards e.g. RSCM Voice for Life	
St Mary-le-Tower, Ipswich	16	a	Tours, excitement of singing, social side	Personal encouragement; worthwhile music to sing; tours and special events. Training system (RSCM and ABRSM and own)	Every Tuesday ‘social time’ for boys to talk, play games and have refreshment. Also they like working towards awards, prepared for in Thursday sessions.	High quality musical training; demonstrate what choristers can do.	Meet them at open events; involve them.
St John the Baptist. Chipping Barnet	17			Flexibility of attendance /commitment in early stages.	Football (informal), bowling, swimming & go-karting outings.	Constant stress on the musical and general benefits. Specific offers to assist with singing is greeted for ‘decent’ secondary school places.	
St Thomas a Canterbury, Brentwood	18	a	A free musical education through the RSCM ‘Voice for Life’ scheme: emphasising our wide repertoire: pocket money: cathedral visits	Providing continuing incentives. Through the ‘Voice for Life’ scheme, encouragement to work for grades and RSCM Chorister Awards: prizes for full monthly attendance and, within a team context, awarding points for finding music first or answering theory questions correctly.	As on left.	As for boys	Keeping communication with the parents open by means of a monthly Newsletter/Choir Diary
Holy Trinity, Guildford	18	a		By keeping the repertory challenging; keeping a good			

				pace. Tours and activities. Team-work; chorister wages			
All Saints Collegiate, Maidstone	18		Chance to receive a professional musical training. Payment (less important than first thought)	Develop a genuine interest in the music/singing. Look after probationers. Tours.	Choir social club.	Free training in singing. Training and achievement more important than payment.	
Romsey Abbey	18	a	Confidence building, social skills, music education, trips,	Make it a 'special' experience, involves fun, social events, team points system	Getting the balance between hard work and social interaction right	As for boys.	
St Leonard, Hythe	20	c	That they will find it fun, develop a skill for life, that they have a talent that can be developed further, that they can get paid (an important factor), that there is no clash with Sunday sports (the boys only sing Evensongs	Let them see they are making progress – ribbons system and pay is related to it. Keeping them busy; making sure everyone feels wanted. Give them little solos, or big ones as they get older. Never give them time to get bored.	Keep them working hard and achieving things, musically and skills-wise. Cathedral visits.	Developing a life skill, spin offs to benefits in other studies and activities, lack of clash with other Sunday activities, being part of a long tradition, enjoyment.	Bi-monthly newsletters and timeables.
Christchurch Priory	20	c	Musical benefits, friendship, the building, pay	Value their presence and make it worth their while; they have to see the fun and benefit of being in the choir	Well planned and challenging rehearsals	Get them to come to a practice	
Bridlington Priory	20	a	The social activities & pay	All new recruits are given a mentor to help them in the early months. Regular social activities (e.g. a monthly choir club) help the new boys to make friends	The 3 yearly Choir Tour to Germany and annual Choir Camp are always an attraction.	The free musical education and the value of music in a child's general development	

St George, Belfast	21	c	Meeting new boys, trips opportunity to travel to new places to sing and stay in a boarding school (!), chorister pay , treats/social events, opportunity to perform concerts: “the audience will pay money to come and hear you sing!”	Trying to make it a fun learning environment and praising them when they work hard and perform well. Plus getting the parents on side. It’s useful if there is group of children from the same year group in the same school – they tend to encourage each other. Plus the parents get to know each other and that’s helpful from the point of view of sharing lifts to rehearsals / services	Choir pay and public standards boards – they respond well to competition Trips/other activities – bowling, Macdonalds, sponsored walks Summer residential choir tours Concerts where they can perform on their other instruments	Emphasise the FREE musical education, the development of skills, confidence, independence and team work, which transfer beneficially to other musical activities and school work	
St Peter & St Paul, Chingford	23	a	The obvious enjoyment the boys gain from singing this sort of music in cathedrals, etc. The educational benefits (many of our choristers have become professional musicians, or this has simply led on to something) Meeting new friends Free vocal tuition (and all the other associated musical training) Our choristers’ club and the various ‘fun’ activities and <i>competitions</i>	You have to hope that what the choir does is enough to enthuse them, and that others will make them welcome enough to want to stay!	Team points / competitions / club etc. It takes time for them to appreciate the music and worship aspect!	As fir boys.	
Croydon Minster	24	c	Minimal commitment to start with, a free music	Every rehearsal is a challenge – you have to make them	They respond to a very particular repertoire and	By emphasising the educational, aspirational	We meet at a voice trial, they complete a

			education	want to come back. I do this with the music, the reward system and by encouraging a competitive atmosphere	this must be carefully paced. I want to encourage a love of this repertoire and for them to WANT to sing. The social and team aspects are also key, but secondary	elements	registration form & I stay in touch by text, email,
St Mary & St Nicholas, Spalding	24	a	Come along and give it a try. Social activities at Choir Club; Outings	Encourage them, lots of praise			When they come along to choir club, I chat to the parents about what is involved
Bath Abbey	24	a	That a particular child is musical and would enjoy it.	Try to make the choir enjoyable through choice of repertoire, rehearsal technique, special classes for probationers and by paying them and by providing social activities	As in previous column.	By telling them that their child is musical and will enjoy	
St Mary the Virgin, South Elmsall, Pontefract	26	a		I usually start about 10 probationers and lose one or two quite early but the choir club with a variety of games helps a lot. When the summer months come I may lose one or two more but if I can hold on to 5 or 6 each year that keeps my numbers up. The probationers have separate practices until the summer holidays I ask them to come once on a Sunday, morning or evening and then gradually encourage them to	As on left	We have a meeting when I tell parents and the possible recruits how we operate and give the boys a very simple test. I do not refuse any these days and those who find singing in tune difficult normally realise after a few weeks and leave of their own accord. I give a solemn undertaking that if a boy does not find the choir as he expected then he is free to leave after his has given us a try for a week o	

				come to both services soon after they have been presented with their surplices		two. At this meeting I tell them about the various promotions as they go through the choir.	
All Saints Collegiate, Wolverhampton	29	c	Teamwork, education, cathedral visits	Working them hard, bringing on probationers as soon as possible, expecting excellent attendance but also being reasonably understanding of absence where it is notified and not adopting a bullying tone.	Having a variety of events – concerts, special services, social time together	As for boys	
St John Baptist, Broughton	36	a		Challenges; competition! The old RSCM weekly standards system; the old RSCM Chorister Training Scheme. Annual tours;		Emphasise: benefits of membership – musical, social etc. Provide prospective parents with latest copy of 'Chorister News' a 'twice a year' publication which highlights achievements of boys, students, adults in the Choir; contains plenty of photos of social activities etc.	

Annex. List of contributors (by place)

Dr	Peter	King	Bath Abbey	Bath
Dr	Emma	Gibbins	St George	Belfast
			St Thomas a	
Mr	David	Rooke	Canterbury	Brentwood
Mr	Michael	Smith	Bridlington Priory	Bridlington
Mr	John	Catterall	St John Baptist	Broughton
Mr	Peter	Tryon	St Mary	Bury St Edmunds
Mr	Michael	Emerson	St Peter & St Paul	Chingford
Mr	Terence	Atkins	St John the Baptist	Chipping Barnet
Mr	Hugh	Morris	Christchurch Priory	Christchurch
Ms	Sara	Wood	Holy Trinity	Cookham
Mr	Andrew	Cantrill	Croydon Minster	Croydon
Mr	Darren	Williams	Doncaster Minster	Doncaster
Mr	Laurence	Notley	Dunstable Priory	Dunstable
Mr	Martin	Holford	Holy Trinity	Guildford
Mr	Michael	Haynes	Hexham Abbey	Hexham
Prof	Berkeley	Hill	St Leonard	Hythe
Mr	Nick	Pedlar	Holy Trinity	Ilfracombe
Dr	Michael	Nicholas	St Mary-le-Tower	Ipswich
Mr	Mark	Swinton	Holy Trinity	Kendal
Revd	Jonathan	Boston	All Saints	Litcham
Mr	Peter	Richards	All Saints Collegiate	Maidstone
Mr	Roger	Buck	St Nicholas	NorthWalsham
Mr	Peter	West	Reading Minster	Reading
Mr	Robert	Fielding	Romsey Abbey	Romsey
				South Elmsall,
Dr	Bernard	Knowles	St Mary the Virgin	Pontefract
Mr	Ian	Wells	Holy Trinity	Southport

Mr	Nicholas	Pitts	St Mary & St Nicholas	Spalding
Mr	Jon	Payne	St Thomas	Stourbridge
Dr	William	Reynolds	St Mary	Swansea
Mr	Peter	Miller	St Mary the Virgin	West Derby
Mr	Peter	Morris	All Saints Collegiate	Wolverhampton
Mr	Richard	Mason	Emmanuel	Wylde Green

Mr	Sean	O'Connell	Corpus Christi	Bournemouth
Dr	Andrew	Kirk	Redcliffe St Mary	Bristol
Mr	Sam	Hayes	Great St Mary's Chesterfield Parish	Cambridge
Dr	Ian	Brackenbury	Churh	Chesterfield
Dom			Worth Abbey parish	Crawley
Mr	Tristan	Russcher	St Bartholomew's	Dublin
Dr	Graeme	Anderson	St Saviour	Dundee
Mr	Christopher	Eastwood	Ealing Abbey parish St Thomas on The	Ealing
Mr	Philip	Viveash	Bourne	Farnham
Mr	Anthony	Pinel	St James the Great	Grimsby
Mr	Jonathan	Eyre	St Nicholas	Harpenden
Mr	Chris	Benham	All Saints	Hertford
Mr	Jeremy	Truslove	Lancaster Priory	Lancaster
Mr	Simon	Lindley	Leeds Parish Churh	Leeds
Mr	Matthew	Haynes	St James the Great	Leicester
Mr	Keith	Morgan	St James	Louth
Mr	Martin	Seymour	All Saints	Marlow
Mr	Robert	Prizeman	St Philip	Norbury, London
Mr	Lee	Dunleavy	All Saints	Northampton

Mr	Andrew	Patterson	St Giles	Oxford
		Raven		
Mr	Robert	(verger)	All Saints	Peterborough
Mr	Roger	Tebbet	Selby Abbey	Selby
			Ranmoor	Sheffield
Mr	Paul	Ellis	Sherborne Abbey	Sherborne
Dr	Nigel	Stark	St Alphage	Solihull
Mr	Nicholas	Robinson	St Peter	St Albans
Mr	Andrew	Wilson	St Mary	Wallington
Mr	Tom	Corns	St Mary	Warwick
Mr	John	Gull	St Thomas	Wigston, Leicester
Mr	David	Gostick	Wimborne Minister	Wimborne