

University Ringing



How to Kickstart a Society

by

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1. Case Study: How to Kickstart a Society

This Case Study has been written by Carys Hughes Blagden and Hana Booth who share their experience and lessons learned in kickstarting a university change ringing society.

1.1 Know your community

Ring regularly with a variety of people and at different towers. Establishing good relationships is helpful to gain the support needed to restart a society.

In 2022/23 Sheffield University Guild of Change Ringers didn't have a home tower but through establishing good relationships we were able to acquire a regular slot at St Marie's. Even if you can't establish your own home tower, a regular agreed practice night for the society to attend is paramount. You are not really a society if you are not ringing together regularly.

1.2 Teaching

We found the ART Module One teacher training course to be particularly beneficial as it provided the basic skills necessary to teach someone to ring. It also provided a framework on which to base lesson plans. Having more experienced teachers from your community on hand is always very helpful as they can support your own learning, but it's important to have the first-hand experience of teaching yourself to ensure your society becomes self-reliant.

1.3 Socialising

It's important to establish a welcoming and comfortable environment for all your members, especially new ringers who may be anxious. Building a solid friendship group in your society really helps to encourage people to stay and generates a positive and supportive environment in the tower. This can mean going to the pub after ringing, but also sober socials of different varieties, to ensure all members are included.

1.4 Quarter peals and peals

We found ringing quarter peals to be a very effective technique to encourage and support the progression of our members. In the early days we struggled to put together an all-student Bob Doubles band, but this is where knowing your community comes in handy, as most ringers in your community are very willing to support you! We found that regular weekly quarter peals enabled members to broaden their repertoire and begin to support other members, becoming more independent learners in the process. A single quarter peal of a method is weeks of practice night touches in just a 45-minute slot. Quarters organised should be accessible and broad in their difficulty levels, being tailored towards every member's individual goal and not just a select few.

1.5 Attend other practice nights

Encouraging the student membership to attend other practice nights ensures not only that they improve their own ringing but that they enhance their own social network within ringing and become accustomed to ringing etiquette and cultural differences between towers. This is especially important to new ringers who may only be familiar with the student society and not the wider ringing world. To ensure they go on to become successful ringers once graduating or moving, they need to forge an independence and confidence of their own, away from the society. It's also important to encourage an ethos of contributing to your local ringing community and the greater ringing world to keep the art alive.

1.6 Sustainability

It's important you help set your society up in such a way that it can withstand the inevitable comings and goings of the student membership. This can be done in many ways. Ensuring training of society members in the ways of teaching, either by your own means or through organisations such as ART, this makes sure students remaining in the society can teach the next influx of members. Establishing a committee and regular committee meetings to ensure major decisions are being led by a team rather than an individual is paramount, this creates a sense of collaboration between members, everyone feels as if their opinion is being heard and accounted for. It's easy to covet a leadership role but it's important to share your own successes and failures with the rest of your society for future reference.

1.7 Retention

It's one thing to recruit members but a whole other to retain them. Fortunately, we ourselves didn't see many people dropping out: why is that the case? We think there's multiple factors that kept our learners coming back.

Firstly, ringing is inherently demoralising at times, especially during the early days of learning to handle, it requires a resilience, but what certainly does help is an encouraging and understanding teacher. It may seem blatantly obvious but be gentle and encouraging of your learners, remember how frustrating and sometimes frightening at times it was to learn handling.

We implemented a clear progression for our learners, they were always instructed on why they were learning what we were teaching them, what would be next and how we would help them get there. Rewards, although seemingly childish, are particularly important; although a first quarter peal certificate may seem simple it can mean a great deal to a freshly minted ringer.

We offered our learners ART 'Learning the Ropes' logbooks. Some tracked their progress, others did not, but equipping your learners with resources they can read outside of the tower will create

more opportunities for learning and developing a passion for ringing. Plenty of these resources are available to buy from the Central Council website using society funds if available.

Once the number of our learners increased, we decided to implement a learners-only practice night, dedicated to handling and occasional beginners rounds and call changes only. We appreciate that not all societies may have the freedom to start not only one but two regular practice nights but setting some time aside to teach learners without any experienced ringers present is important. It allows the learner a more personal and dedicated experience and may ease any nervousness of handling in front of more experienced ringers. It also creates a sense of camaraderie between learners who will grow together.

1.8 Conducting

Even the most experienced band cannot ring rounds and call changes if there isn't someone willing to call it. In the early days we had little to no experience conducting and had to rely on gracious support from our community, and still occasionally do. However, in time we realised the importance of learning to conduct ourselves to ensure our society's self-reliance. Not only that, but we have now begun to teach conducting to other members of our society. This is paramount! For who is going to conduct when you have graduated? It doesn't have to be anything fancy or complex; teaching your members how to conduct call changes or saying go and stop can go a long way. If you yourself have very little conducting experience, then it's time to learn!

We found books such as Steve Coleman's *Bob Callers' Companion* to be useful in giving an introductory guide to beginning to conduct; this could be a good place to start if you're completely new. Otherwise, asking for advice from other ringers and getting them to recommend compositions can help to ensure you pick suitable compositions for both you and the band. Finally, learning to conduct requires a little confidence; don't be phased by making mistakes, everyone does, just smile and move on!

2. Conclusion

Kickstarting a university society is a challenging but rewarding experience and we hope sharing our experiences will help you establish your society.