



abcd Annual Report 2018-2019

The Trustees, who are also directors of the charity for the purposes of the Companies Act, submit their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 30 April 2019. The Trustees confirm that the reported financial statements of the charity comply with the current statutory requirements, the requirements of the Charity's governing documents, and the provisions of "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102)" effective 1 January 2015 (Charities SORP FRS 102).

Structure, Governance and Management

abcd is a company limited by guarantee and has no share capital. It is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association dated 4 May 2000 and subsequent amendments, together with supplementary rules agreed by the Trustees and Council. It is registered as a charity with the Charity Commission.

The Board of Trustees, which is responsible for the financial and strategic direction of the Association, met five times during the year.

The Advisory Council is elected to represent the interests, views and wishes of the membership and of choral directors generally. The present Council comprises five regional representatives (out of a possible ten), two corporate members and

eight expert practitioners. It meets quarterly, guiding strategy, planning future events and exchanging information.

The Board is required to consult with and pay due regard to the outcome of the deliberations of the Council and to seek to act in accordance with any recommendations arising from them which are compatible with the achievement of the strategic aims of the Association. The Chair of Trustees also chairs the Council, and the General Secretary, Treasurer and Membership Secretary are ex officio members of the Council. The Deputy Chair of the Council (if not a Trustee) attends Trustees' meetings by invitation. Trustees also attend Council meetings wherever possible.

Trustees are recruited following an evaluation of needs, and advertisement inside and outside the organisation, and a succession policy for the Board and the Council operates to ensure that we continue to have the range of expertise needed as members retire. As part of their induction, new trustees are given access to the following information and assistance:

- Trustee role description, memorandum and articles of association, annual report and accounts and minutes of recent meetings
- An opportunity for discussion with other trustees and attendance at events
- Charity Commission guidance on the role and responsibilities of Trustees

Dominic Higgins retired as a Trustee in May 2018. The Company Secretary and Finance Director, John Gripton, indicated during the year that he wished to stand down and recruitment of a successor was initiated. We are very grateful to John, who steps down at the AGM in August 2019, for his excellent management of abcd's finances during a difficult period. Following the recruitment process, we are pleased to have appointed Ryan Connolly as his successor.

Objectives

abcd's charitable objectives are:-

- (a) To promote, improve and maintain the education, training and development of choral directors
- (b) To promote or develop for the benefit of the public the science, art and craft of choral direction, conducting and training in all its branches and likewise to promote and develop improved methods of direction, conducting and training of choirs and choral singers
- (c) To promote study and research in the field of choral direction, conducting and training.

During the year, work continued on implementing our 5-year Strategic Plan, *Leading the Chorus*. Under the overarching vision of:

A world where well-led choral singing enriches everyone's lives

it sets out our mission as:

- to equip choral leaders with the

skills they need for all forms of collective singing

- to provide information and resources to help them in their work and careers
- to support them and work to improve the climate for choral music in Britain

and to run *abcd* so that our current activity becomes self-sustaining by 2019.

During the year the process of developing a Strategic Plan for 2020-2024 was begun, with discussions involving Trustees and Council members. To help inform this process the Association was assisted by The Worshipful Company of Marketors. Following an approach by the Chair of *abcd*, the Marketors' Company agreed to carry out a review of *abcd*'s operations with emphasis on membership growth and raising the profitability of the annual convention. The review, which was carried out by a member of the Marketors' Outreach team, John When, *pro bono*, was completed in January 2019. Recommendations made in the report were considered by the *abcd* Council in February 2019 and the Trustees in March 2019. Subsequently, elements of the report's recommendations were adopted by the Chair of *abcd* who led the Strategic Planning. The Trustees are very grateful to The Worshipful Company of Marketors for its generous support that is acknowledged in the accounts and on the *abcd* website.

At the same time, further efforts were being made to add to our corporate membership. Following the agreement with Oxford University Press to become the first Gold Corporate Member in June 2018, two other organisations agreed to sign up to this new category of membership – ABRSM in October 2018 and Hal Leonard Europe in February 2019. As well as providing much needed financial support, the three Gold Corporate Members have become more actively involved in the working of the Association.

Training

Training in choral leadership is planned and delivered by the Training and Standards Unit, headed

by Amy Bebbington, Director of Training. The TSU is supported by the Training Moderation Group, which provides a link between the Training and Standards Unit and the Trustees. Training aims to meet the needs of individuals wherever they are in their choral conducting, and to equip them for their future careers. It is non-prescriptive in approach and develops confidence and practical skills which can be used by those leading singing of any kind. Its value and effectiveness is shown by the feedback received, the numbers applying for courses, and the success achieved by many alumni.

Our revised and re-branded courses have gained momentum over the past year and these, alongside a number of new one-day initiatives, have proved popular with members and non-members alike. Our ongoing masterclass series (The Twelve), offering a masterclass opportunity with a full-sized chorus continued, with a workshop on *Messiah* in Huddersfield in October 2018.

Extended Conducting Courses

During the last year, we ran two double courses of our Initial level, Leading the Singing and Foundation, in London. We also held an Emerging and Progressive course in London in spring 2018 and another is in progress. The Progressive course replaces the Intermediate course and the Emerging course gives our system an extra level between Initial and Intermediate. These operated under the guidance and marking schemes agreed in April 2013 to ensure they continue to meet the high standards students have come to expect from *abcd* training. Our Advanced course is held every two years and a successful course took place in autumn 2018/ spring 2019. A total of 63 students completed extended courses in the last year, with a further 80 people taking part in one-day or short training courses at all levels.

The Pre-Convention conducting course and Convention Young Conductors course were also well-attended. A generous grant from the Harold Hyam Wingate Foundation has enabled us to offer a bigger fee reduction for Young Conductors, in line with our strategic plan aim to cut fees for young conductor events by

20%, as well as running a number of one-off days for Young Conductors. We now need to source further funding for this programme. The Andrew Potter OUP Bursary now also allows us to award further assistance to an 18-27-year-old to attend Pre-Convention and Convention. The 2018 Bursary was awarded to Claire Hughes.

Events

Annual Convention 2018

The Annual Convention took place at the Headingley campus of Leeds Beckett University, which was a popular venue back in 2012. Thomas Leech took on the role of Artistic Director, assisted by the Yorkshire committee. Presenters included Emily Barden, John Barron, Amy Bebbington, James Bingham, Michael Bonshor, Frances Cooke, Xenia Davis, Neil Ferris, Jonathan Griffith (USA), Lucy Griffiths, Susan Hollingworth, Charlotte Kitson, Alexander Kyle, Craig Lees, Charles MacDougall, Shona Mackay, Shaun Matthew, James Meaders, Vytautas Miškinis (Lithuania), Sharon Moloney, Luzili Mulindi-King, Janet Oates, Manvinder Rattan, Oliver Rundell, Joanna Tomlinson, Em Whitfield Brooks and Jenevora Williams.

Amongst the sessions and strands was an access and community strand, including a plenary discussion on encouraging diversity in choirs, a subject which future conventions will certainly return to. Repertoire sessions remained very popular, including a session on opera for choirs and Lithuanian choral music with the composer Vytautas Miškinis. Conducting masterclasses were held once more, along with advice for those leading rock and pop choirs. Sessions for those working with young voices were led by Opera North Education and the Diocese of Leeds Singing Programme. We also worked with Making Music to run a one-day workshop for those wanting experience conducting an orchestra.

The gala concert was given in Leeds Cathedral, where choirs included New Dublin Voices, Leeds Contemporary Singers and the National Youth Choir of Great Britain Boys' Choir. For the first time, the concert was signed, by

Paul Whittaker OBE – a memorable experience for everyone.

Our exhibition was fully subscribed as usual, organised by Di Morley, and we were delighted to welcome a larger than usual contingent from elsewhere in Europe. Susan Hollingworth received the Chair's Award.

National and regional events

A number of events were again run in our regions, many supported or organised entirely by volunteers, without whose dedicated work much of *abcd*'s work would not happen. These included:

Midlands

The region held another successful 'choir matters' day in Stafford, which included a session on warm-ups, a repertoire sharing session and a singing afternoon led by Cathy Lamb and Richard Jeffries.

North West

Cambiata NW, a choir for boys whose voices are changing, ran for an eighth successful year, organised by Andy Brookes and led by Ian Crawford, with a large group of boys singing in the final concert. The region also held another highly successful Come and Sing day, this time with Bob Chilcott, in March 2019 in Chester, which was sold out. The region also hosted a training day, 'Moving Forwards', a follow-up from our successful basic skills days.

Yorkshire

As well as hosting Convention, the region hosted two training events, a basic skills day at Leeds College of Music led by Martin Cook, and the next in our series 'The Twelve', on Messiah, led by Julian Wilkins with Tom Leech. The event was in partnership with Huddersfield University and also involved 75 singers from local choirs, Bradford Festival Choral Society and Chesterfield Philharmonic Choir.

Membership resources and support

Our website, with its members' area *The Podium*, provides a large range of information and resources for choral leaders. Articles on topics of current interest appear in *Mastersinger Online*, as well as a substantial part of the archive from the previous print



New Dublin Voices were one of three guest choirs at Convention 2018

editions which now numbers well over 400 articles. On the public area, the vacancies page remains the most popular part of the site. Although it is well used, we are conscious that the website's design is now dated and work is underway to update the design and functionality, without a costly rebuild of the back end management system which houses our membership records and events booking.

Under our agreement with Rhinegold Publications, members can also access an exclusive digital edition of *Choir and Organ*, with *abcd* news and articles. This is supplemented by our monthly e-newsletter *Leading Notes*. We have nearly 4,000 Twitter followers, over 2,500 members of our longstanding Facebook group (including many non-members); last summer we also created a Facebook page, which is also gathering momentum. We continue to extend our online booking facilities and most bookings for courses and Convention are now made this way.

Membership

Membership at the end of the financial year stood at 652 (2017-18: 711) individuals and 53 (2017-18: 49) Associate and Corporate Members. We are grateful to Midlands member Carol Bowns for her continued work as Membership Secretary. We are also grateful to our Corporate and Associate members, whose active involvement is an essential feature of *abcd*'s support for choral leaders.

Experience shows that most members are recruited through personal contact and/or attending an *abcd* event or course, and increasingly through the website – the vast majority of new members now join online, whatever their method of finding out about us has been.

The importance of providing support

to choral leaders throughout their careers, but especially in the early stages, was one of the key things which emerged from the consultations on *Leading the Chorus*. In response we introduced a concessionary membership scheme for young choral leaders, giving all choral leaders under the age of 28 a discounted membership rate, with up to two years' free membership for those 25 and under. This scheme has proved very successful and has been revised slightly to make it simpler. We now have over 120 Young Conductor members: the challenge is to retain them. We are also investigating new ways of working with universities and colleges to provide more direct support to music students and attract them to choral leadership.

Improving the climate for choral singing

The Association continues to work with other organisations through Singing Network UK (formerly TONSIL, The ONGoing SINGing Liaison Group), 14 organisations promoting choral singing across a wide variety of genres, supporting over 25,000 members' choirs and over 500,000 singers, enabling choral organisations as a whole to make representations about national issues. We also work with the European Choral Association, a network of member organisations, choirs, singers, conductors, composers and choral managers in 42 European countries dedicated to education and cultural exchange among young people in the field of vocal music. This year's Convention has been renamed 'Festival' and includes a partnership with the ECA, allowing us to make the event a day longer and include an international day, as well as attracting more conductors from all over Europe.

abcd has continued to contribute to the Music Education Council's Strategy Working Group on Singing. This is one of several working groups set up by MEC to develop a manifesto to present to politicians before the next general election on all aspects of music education.

We continue to work closely with Making Music, and offer reciprocal reduced introductory membership rates. As mentioned above, last year's Convention included a collaborative day-long workshop with Making Music for orchestral and choral conductors and we hope to build on this.

The first London International Choral Conducting Competition took place in October 2018 and we were pleased to be involved in promoting it and organising a young conductors' day as part of the weekend.

We have built up new partnerships with Stagecoach, the performing arts organisation for young people, and plans are being made to run bespoke training courses for their leaders. We are Corporate members of Music Mark and through them are starting to build up valuable relationships with Music Hubs.

Over the year we have attended an increasing number of conferences as exhibitors, which has enabled us to build many new relationships with other organisations and choral leaders of all kinds. These have included the Music and Drama Education Expo at Olympia and the annual conferences of Stagecoach and Music Mark. *abcd* representatives have also attended British Association of Barbershop Singers events.

Keeping *abcd* running

Much of the day to day running of *abcd* falls to our highly-valued and tireless staff team: Rachel Greaves, our General Secretary, supported by Elisabeth Brierley, Training Manager. Elisabeth was appointed in August 2018 following the resignation of the previous post-holder Penny Homer. Nevertheless, *abcd* could not operate without the energy, commitment and goodwill of office-holders such as our Membership Secretary, Convention Administrator and Director of Training, who may claim small fees which recognise, but certainly do not



Lucy Griffiths leads an Initial Course session

fully reimburse, the time they give to *abcd*; the Trustees and Council members; and many volunteers involved in organising events both nationally and regionally, and in running our IT and website. *abcd* could not exist without the energy, goodwill and commitment of all of these.

There is no doubt that maintaining the activity of *abcd* in a period of financial instability continues to be challenging. The Association is dependent for its financial well-being on membership subscriptions being maintained and built on but also on the support of both members and others for our training courses. Nevertheless, we are continuing to develop the range of services offered to our members and the wider choral community, as set out in *Leading the Chorus*, so as to continue to meet the needs of choral leaders and contribute to the musical life of Britain.

Financial Review and Reserves Policy

The financial results for the period are set out in our published accounts. They show a small deficit of £232, compared with a deficit of £18,005 for the year ended 30th April 2018. There was a pleasing surplus on unrestricted expenditure of £2,939 compared with a deficit of £12,757 for 2018. The total reserves at 30th April 2019 were £25,941, compared with £44,785 at 30th April 2018. Unrestricted reserves at 30th April 2019 were £25,941 compared with £38,698 at 30th April 2018. Total expenditure during the year was £152,294 (2018 - £151,405). We aim to retain unrestricted reserves

at least equivalent to one year's core costs, to ensure we are able to meet our commitments and run planned courses and events for which payment is often taken in advance. Current unrestricted reserves represent 37% of a year's core costs.

Public Benefit

The Trustees have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit, including the guidance on public benefit and fee charging. The Association relies on grants and the income from subscriptions, fees and charges to cover its operating costs. Careful consideration is given to ensuring that fees are set at levels which make activities as accessible to as wide a range of the public as possible, with a certain amount of subsidy provided for events which may be of particular benefit to a group which may not be able to afford the level of fees necessary to make it break-even, such as a day for young choral leaders. Most events are open alike to members and non-members, with the latter often making up a significant proportion of attendees. Much of the material on the website is available to all, including vacancies, our most-visited page.

Leslie East
Chair of Trustees