

Leading the Chorus

Strategic plan for the Association of British Choral Directors 2014-19

Bob Chilcott conducts the North West Honour Choir, Blackburn Cathedral, June 2013



Our vision...

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

Our mission...

- 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.

abcd and its members have a collective and transformational impact founded on some core beliefs:

- choral singing unites, strengthens, and enriches all communities and ages
- good leadership gives a more fulfilling experience for participants and hearers
- choral leaders need support to get the best from themselves and their singers

What we are doing – briefly:

Skills

- we provide training in choral direction which aims to match the best available anywhere:
 - ♦ in 2013/14 we provided 3,270 student/training hours, and aim to increase this by 5% each year
 - ♦ in addition to our national Convention, we aim to have run at least one major event in each region and one additional national event by end 2015/16, with 1700 attending **abcd** events over the year and 100 attending one for the first time
- we are putting more training material online and aim to triple our available video content

Information

- we will continue to provide a one-stop shop for new repertoire and services at our Convention exhibition, with exhibitor numbers increasing each year
- we offer or signpost online information on technique, repertoire, and practice, and aim to improve the range and searchability of the virtual library with 400 articles available in 2015-16

Support

- subject to securing funding, we will set up another 6 apprenticeships in 2015/16, and reduce fees for attendance at young conductor events by 20%
- we will work with partners to gain better recognition of the value of **abcd** training

Running **abcd**

- we aim to continue to grow membership, with 20 more young conductor members each year
- we will also engage members more in our work, with volunteer hours increasing by 5% each year
- we aim to bridge the current funding gap with external funding, and become self-sustaining with two staff by 2019.

Who we are

The Association of British Choral Directors (**abcd**) was set up in 1986 to support and develop choir directors. Since then, choral music in Britain has changed in many ways: as some traditional choral societies and church choirs have declined, new groups of all sizes and types, from professional-level chamber choirs to pop and rock choirs, have flourished. Choral singing has a high social and media profile, and is recognised as having health and social benefits: overall there are probably more people of all ages taking an active part in collective singing than at any time since **abcd** was founded.

This creates a demand for leaders with skills and knowledge applicable to a wide range of music and groups. Being an organist, orchestral musician or chorister can provide an unrivalled musical education, but may not equip someone with all they need – including technical, people and management skills – for every genre they may be expected to perform. Few now make a living with just one or two traditional choirs or as a full-time church musician. The portfolio of the professional choral director may well include a choral society, a community or workplace choir, a youth group, a chamber choir, and a barbershop, gospel or pop choir. Alongside these are the thousands of musicians with other day jobs, inside or outside music, for whom choral leadership is a spare- or part-time activity, paid, underpaid, or unpaid.

abcd aims to meet the needs of all choral leaders, and the groups they front, in this changing world. The fact that **abcd** is still here, and is now reaching more choral leaders than ever before (see key facts), shows there remains a demand for the support we offer. But how we provide it can and must adapt to the changes in the choral world. We have to reach them where they are – geographically, in their music-making careers (portfolio or otherwise), and their working lives (part of which are spent in the digital world). At the same time, the fact that the same people are often found leading several of the different types of music mentioned shows that there is a core of essential skills which are transferable to many, if not most, choral situations, and we should be aiming to equip leaders with these skills.

IN 2013:

- ▶ membership reached an all-time high of 782
- ▶ we ran 6 extended conducting courses with 81 students including our first Advanced course
- ▶ over 1,500 came to **abcd** events
- ▶ there were over 49,000 visits to our web-site, of which over 21,000 were new visitors
- ▶ we advertised 80 posts for choral directors, assistants and accompanists
- ▶ over 1000 followed us on Twitter

What we do

Our provision falls under the three broad headings of our mission:

Skills

all provision from which choral directors gain skills, knowledge, understanding or experience: includes Convention, regional events, repertoire days as well as training days and courses, and online as well as physical provision.

Information

ranging from repertoire to the membership directory.

Support

both individual (advice, mentoring, networking, job vacancies) and collective – eg lobbying for support of choral singing in education and the arts.

Some general principles:

- do what we do best, or are best placed to do.
- don't do, or do in partnership, what others can do better (See chart at Annex B for a "map" of our and others' provision.)

We aim to offer something for everyone, from the primary teacher getting their class singing, to the experienced professional conductor. The risk is that this very inclusivity can be offputting: the novice sees **abcd** as for the expert, the expert sees it as for the trainee. We aim to counter this by getting **abcd** better-known, running more entry-level events, and offering more specialised provision for the experienced choral director.



Keith Orrell with student at conducting workshop, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Skills

abcd aims to provide training in choral direction which matches the best available anywhere. The achievements of its alumni who have gone on to gain professional recognition and lead award-winning choirs is testimony to its success. We have extended the range of training in both directions with Leading from the Front and Foundation courses at one end, to the new Advanced course at the other.

National

We have:

- increased the training provided, with 81 students on 6 courses in 2013 plus courses run alongside Convention and several one-off days, a total of 3,270 student/training hours¹
- run our first Advanced Course, from which 7 students went on to gain the Licentiate of the Royal Schools of Music
- appointed a new Training Manager

We will:

- run more training courses and days, including orchestral conducting when resources are available, and increasing student/training hours by 5% each year
- develop a CPD package tailored for Music Hubs
- put more material online (see below)
- review how our Training and Standards Unit operates, to ensure we continue to deliver training which is relevant to the needs of all choral directors, meeting recognised quality standards.



Young Conductor day, Glasgow

Cambiata NW perform at the BBC Proms, August 2014



¹ ie the total number of hours of tuition received by all students on training courses

Regional

We have:

- run 19 singing and training days in 2013, with 1500 attending events in total
- supported new movements in choral singing, including Cambiata for boys' changing voices

We will:

- generate a minimum level of activity in each region, with support from the centre or neighbouring regions where necessary
- provide models and guidance based on successful events – “event in a box”
- hold regional roadshows on specialist topics such as social media
- build local partnerships with other organisations and institutions such as colleges, and music retailers
- we aim to have run at least one major event in each region by end 2015/16, with 1700 attending **abcd** events (including Convention) and 100 doing so for the first time



Young singers during Sing Up project in Cornwall

Virtual

We have:

- given students on conducting courses online access to recordings of them

We will:

- make more video guidance available online (see box) and triple our available video content
- introduce online booking for events and Convention

VIDEO TASTERS

when we run a course or an event, we will capture some of the key features in online tasters – short (5 minute) clips of a tutor or presenter showing a key aspect of technique, explaining aspects of a particular piece, or providing background – or just an entertaining anecdote.

Information

As well as equipping leaders with skills, we aim to be a key source of information for choral leaders at all stages of their career.

Physical

We have:

- combined skills training with Convention sessions and one-off days on repertoire and technical and practical aspects of running choirs
- provided a shop-window for our corporate and associate members, and a one-stop shop for new repertoire and other services, at our Convention exhibition

We will:

- provide entry-level sessions and taster days for those new to choral leadership
- run more one-off days on specialised and technical subjects such as voice science

Virtual

We have:

- completely redesigned our website, which received 49,000 visits in 2013
- added resources including a large library of articles from our journal Mastersinger
- moved our membership database online

We will:

- expand the information available online (see box) with 400 articles



Delegates sing at Convention 2011

- improve the searchability and segmentation of the information available for different choral interest groups
- provide or signpost other information choral directors need, from contracts to insurance to safeguarding, working with organisations such as Making Music

- ▶ articles on various subjects such as voice science
- ▶ repertoire guides
- ▶ tips from the top: how leading conductors do it

Support

While life for choral directors has never been easy, career paths are less clear-cut than they may have been in the past due to the changing choral landscape. We aim to support them at all stages of their career, from starting out to moving on; and to help improve the environment for choral music in Britain, opening up more opportunities to good leaders.

We have:

- offered more young conductor course and days, with bursaries to help meet the costs
- run several rounds of apprenticeships with established choirs and choral directors for those just starting out
- provided a vacancy service free to applicants
- shown the best in British and international choral singing at our gala concerts

We will:

- cut subscriptions for those under 25
- increase our use of social media
- hold fora for students in higher education to find out their needs
- hold more regional networking events
- set up a further round of 6 apprenticeships
- cut fees for young conductor events across the board by 20%
- ensure the value added by **abcd** training is more widely recognised, and where possible credited in qualifications (see box)
- recognise outstanding contribution to choral leadership with a new award
- join with partner organisations in national initiatives to promote choral singing
- provide more opportunities to hear the best choirs from around the world, not just at Convention but through tours and international choral competitions.



Midlands region education workshop

We want choirs to get the best from their directors – when appointing them and in their music-making together – and vice versa. We will work with Making Music to build recognition of the value-added given by **abcd** membership and training and improve career opportunities for members.

Kyoto Echo Choir at Convention 2014



Keeping *abcd* running

Delegates at Convention exhibition



None of this can happen without resources – financial, certainly, but also human. This includes not just the staff, but office-holders such as Membership Secretary, Convention Administrator and Director of Training, who receive honoraria which recognise, but certainly do not fully reimburse, the time they give to *abcd*. In addition there are the dozens of volunteers who keep *abcd* going, including the Trustees and members of Council who help

to plan *abcd*'s strategy and activity, and oversee the day-to-day management and finances; and members involved in organising and running events both nationally and regionally. *abcd* simply could not exist without the energy, commitment and goodwill of all of these people.

The membership at large is a vital part of *abcd*. They form an active community, and belonging to it is for many in itself a benefit of membership. Members (and their subscriptions) give us a firm platform, on which we can plan our activities with confidence, without having either to make a surplus every time or look for external funding. More members make us more secure, supportive and representative. Yet events are attended by many non-members, and many members attend few if any events (which isn't to say they do not find membership of value). Experience suggests that trying to recruit members as an end in itself doesn't work; it is by being more active and visible, providing useful resources and running more and better events, that we reach more choral leaders and, indirectly, gain more members.



Joint vocal health day with British Voice Association, Birmingham

Nevertheless, we aim for the current growth in membership to continue, and in particular want to see 20 more young conductor members each year. We also want members to feel more closely engaged not just in the running but in the planning of the organisation, as we did at the Open Forum day which fed in to this Strategy, and aim to increase our volunteer hours by 5% each year.

We will apply for external funding to cover the current shortfall of income over costs and expand further the programme of training and events, with a view to the organisation generating enough additional resources from subscriptions and activity to be self-sustaining with two staff by 2019.

November 2014

[Annex A](#) Impact chart
[Annex B](#) Provision map

Association of British Choral Directors

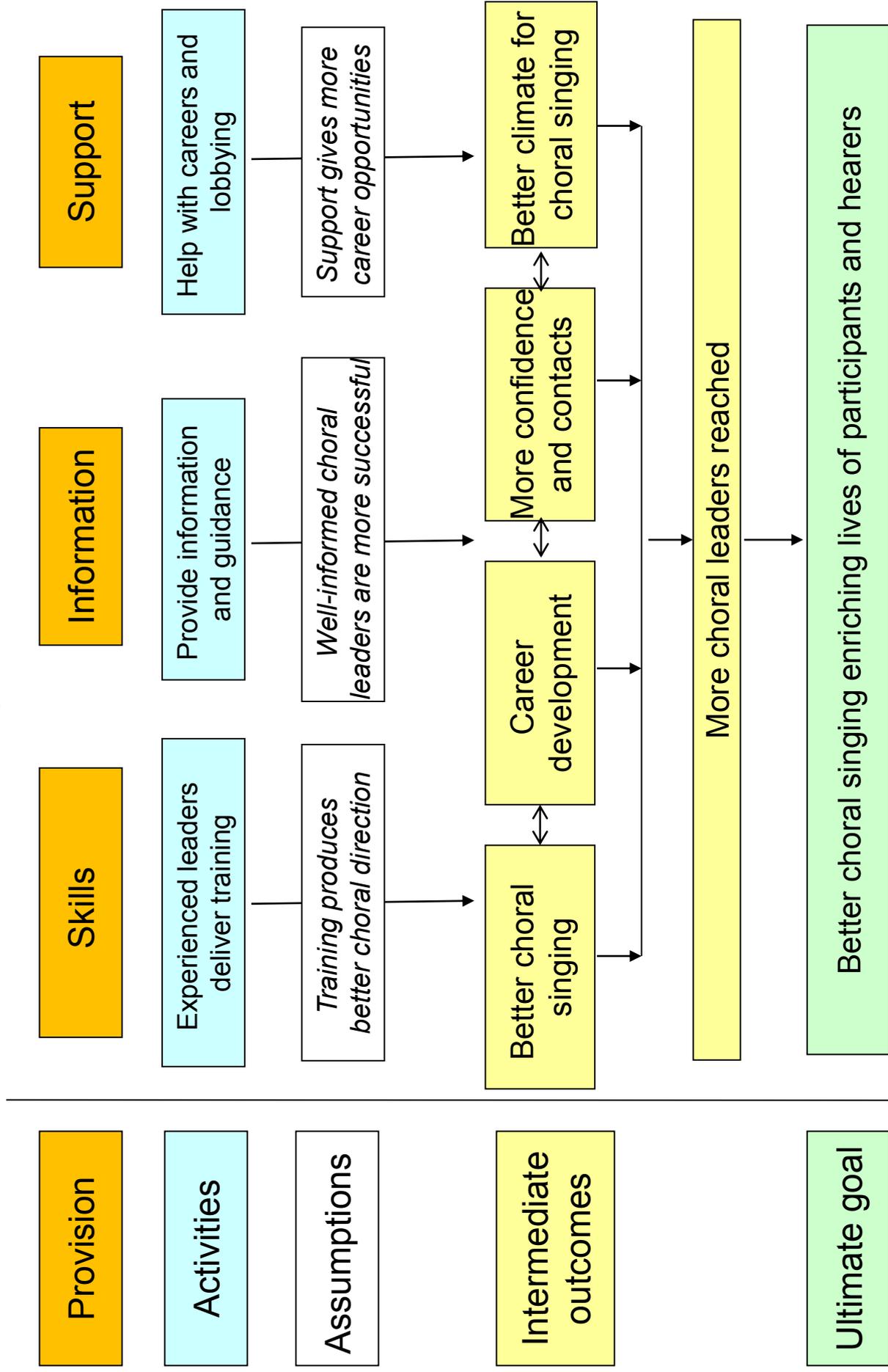
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abcd Impact Chart



| | | CONDUCTING SKILLS | | | | OTHER KEY LEADERSHIP SKILLS | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| | | Beginners | Intermediate | Advanced | Other | Rehearsal organisation | Vocal training | Programme planning and development | Choir management & promotion | Legal and other info |
| Online | PROVIDED BY ABCD | Forum (potentially) | Mastersinger archive | Choir & Organ | | Forum | Choir & Organ | Choir & Organ Mastersinger archive Podium reviews | | Job Vacancies News & Events, international (Podium/C&O/ Leading Notes) |
| | | Initial conducting course in 2 venues 2 times p.a. | Intermediate course in 2 venues once p.a. | Advanced course One day Advanced level workshops Sessions at Convention | | Sessions at Convention Covered in courses | Sessions at Convention Joint days with BVA Covered in courses | Covered in courses Repertoire days Repertoire sessions at Convention | Occasional sessions at Convention | |
| Regional training and events | | Singing Days | Mentoring schemes | | Leading classroom singing Orchestral conducting | | | | | |
| Online | PROVIDED BY OTHER ORGS. | | BABS | | | BBC – video clips from TV progs | | Making Music programme notes ACDA database | Making Music website resources | |
| Training and events | | RCO RSCM Benslow Sing for Pleasure BABS Various summer schools | | Only as part of degree courses or by individual development eg towards LRSM | Voices Foundation | BVA BABS/LABBS | | | Making Music seminars | |