

Survey results

This note summarises the results of a web based survey of members views on striking competitions. They were invited to visit the Branch website and provide their views by filling in a simple form.

Response

Between New Year and 23 January 2017 there were 31 responses – around 20% of members. That compares with 38 responses to the 2011 survey about Branch practices and 9 responses to the 2012 survey about Branch business meetings. The table shows the spread across Branch towers.

Tower	2017 Replies	2012	2011
Arborfield	3	2	3
Barkham	1	0	0
Binfield	1	0	3
Easthampstead	1	2	3
Finchampstead	4	1	4
Hurst	1	0	2
Sandhurst St Michael	0	0	1
Sandhurst Immaculate Conception	0	0	0
Shottesbrooke	0	1	0
Sonning	6	1	8
Twyford	1	0	1
Waltham St Lawrence	0	0	3
Warfield	1	0	1
Wargrave	1	0	1
White Waltham	2	2	2
Wokingham All Saints	7	0	5
Wokingham St Paul	1	0	1
Unattached	1	0	0
Total	31	9	38

About the competition (Q1 – Q3)

Most respondents (90%) felt that friendly local competitions can encourage ringers like you to think about improve striking? 7 people thought competitions could be undesirable but since 5 of them those also answered yes to question 1, they presumably consider that would relate to how the competition was run, rather than being inherent.

About half unsure whether there were better ways to encourage bands to focus on striking. 6 thought there weren't and 9 thought there were. 10 people made suggestions:

- Listening/good striking workshop at individual towers on their practice nights.
- Extended ringing in peals and quarter peals is a more effective way to develop good striking
- League based competition with bands visiting each other's practice for home/away fixtures
- Branch events could be reviewed but not stopping the striking competitions
- Inter tower league
- You could go for rounds or call changes or a simple set method that is not usually rung.

- Inter-tower competitions
- More mixed bands - few towers can muster a whole band
- encourage visits to other practice nights
- Ringing Tours and 'at homes' where one tower hosts another

About taking part (Q4 – Q5)

Three quarters would be willing to ring if their tower entered a team, a sixth were unsure and a tenth would not. Willingness to ring in a team other than the home tower was more evenly split (29% yes, 39% no, 35% unsure).

About the timing (Q5 – Q7)

Most participants (84%) were happy with the timing. Two people were unhappy and three were unsure. Times suggested as better alternatives were Saturday morning (4) or early afternoon (2). 40% said they would not find another time more convenient but the survey didn't ask whether they would find it inconvenient.

About the format (Q8 – Q16)

Just over half of respondents thought the format of competitions should change. A third were unsure and the rest felt they should stay the same.

Nearly half thought competitions would be more attractive if combined with something else, a similar number were unsure and only three thought they would not be. Quite a lot suggested what would make them more attractive. A fun quiz was the clear lead, with several suggesting a talk/workshop.

A hot meal instead of tea	1
A talk on a ringing related topic	5
A workshop/seminar on a ringing related topic	5
A fun quiz?	11
A serious quiz?	6
Entertainment (eg musical)	1

Entertainment suggestions included:

- Handbells, small choir, solo performances by members
- It would be great to see what other music the ringers do. Put out a call for a Branch band?

Other suggestions included:

- Display of things members have made in the past.
- Socialising in the pub
- Social function not reflecting ringing ability
- Perhaps creating a core group of 'social ambassadors' who visit towers where bands haven't participated, to have a face to face dialogue. If we have towers where the ringers are largely new, perhaps create other categories (eg for those who have rung less than 5 years).
- Perhaps a short talk on the history of the place/church tower or if a local pub a social

Background (Q18 – Q20)

All respondents were aware of Branch striking competitions and most (87%) had rung in one. The same number (87%) said their tower had entered a competition. The remainder thought their tower had not entered (though in one case it had) and one was unsure.

General feedback

The survey invited general comments on competitions or on anything else of concern. Responses included:

- a) Judges' kind comments about those they think are 'inexperienced' ringers can seriously backfire. I have known a not particularly good ringer with decades of experience be thoroughly cheesed off (and put off ever entering again) by a judge's comment that they might be inexperienced. And this is just the sort of ringer who needs encouragement to improve their striking!
- b) I have participated but do not enjoy the ordeal.
- c) Whilst I know we are aiming for good striking it can be soul-destroying to know that whatever you do you still fail. I think puts a lot of people off taking part.
- d) Sometimes competitions seems too elitist - always same teams with very good ringers win, which doesn't give other teams a chance. Perhaps two competitions one for the more experienced and one for the less experienced?
- e) My perception is that a large number of ringers do not feel that their striking is good enough to take part. This is clearly not the case, but it seems to be difficult to persuade individuals that they will not be at risk of 'letting down the rest of the band' if their striking is less than perfect. I would feel reluctant to take part at my stage of learning, though if asked I would probably participate if it enabled my tower to enter a team.
- f) One thing that would really make it feel more worthwhile to enter would be a way of judging the absolute standard of the striking in a way that could be compared from year to year. That way we could aim to improve our striking even if our position in the field is never likely to be particularly high and more dependant on who else enters than anything else.
- g) Check mid week league operating in Swindon area.
- h) Fix ringing times in advance? Less waiting or more to do?
- i) Maybe more "hard" notification sent to towers (printed notice etc)
- j) When mentioned in Tower no one was interested.
- k) Is good striking something all towers do strive for? It is something we should do, but I wonder how true it is.

Commentary on feedback

Points (a) & (b) relate to adverse past experience. Obviously we should try to avoid such experiences in future.

Points (c) to (e) focus on the perceived inadequacy of some ringers about their own skills, and about the (un)likelihood of winning. They raise questions about how ringers can feel better about their striking (at whatever level) and how the experience of taking part can be made worthwhile for participants who don't win (the majority).

Points (f) & (g) suggest possible new approaches.

Point (h), superficially about logistics, implies that time not ringing is wasted. Could it be seen as productive if other activities were included?

Point (k) gets to the heart of the matter. How much do our members care about striking – and how much should they?

Conclusions

A 20% response rate is comparable to the 2011 survey, and slightly better than the 10-15% typical for customer surveys.

Although the sample is self selected rather than randomised, around half of responses only came after a strong reminder.

Subject to these caveats the responses provide some useful insights & suggestions.

Recommendations

- Explore a possible move to the morning [checking that this would not be less convenient for more than it helped].
- Include a quiz (or other event) to add interest [and evaluate the result].
- Explore objective measurement of striking to supplement judges subjective and qualitative comments & advice.
- Raising awareness of striking
- Explore ways in which the Branch could support bands or individuals who would like to improve their striking.
- Consider the possible striking events other than 'one-off, one-winner' competitions, for example a league or ladder.

These actions could potentially relate to both competitions, but the needs and constraints of the two are slightly different. The Branch is already discussing the format of the joint 8-bell competition with Reading Branch, so it might be best to focus thoughts on the 6-bell initially.

Summary of responses

