

# Targeted practices?

This is one of the topics that will be on the agenda at the Business Meeting in November, at which we hope all tower bands will be represented. I was asked to circulate a note before the meeting explaining some of the issues and introducing some of the questions so that we can all come to the meeting prepared to discuss them. There are no easy answers so please can think about the issues and discuss within your band.

## What's the problem?

The Branch exists to support its members and provide opportunities over and above what individual tower bands provide. One way it has done this is through monthly Branch practices, open to all members. Traditionally anyone turns up and the ringing master tries to provide useful experiences for whoever is present. That can work well with a suitable mix of participants' needs and abilities, but not always.

If inexperienced ringers can't ring what they hoped (or their attempts fail for lack of an stable band around them) they go away unsatisfied. If capable ringers take part in touches where no one really benefits they feel their time has been wasted. In both cases they are less likely to return, and as numbers fall it becomes harder to provide ringing that benefits anyone.

## Could targeted practices help?

In some places (in the Guild and elsewhere) people have successfully tried other approaches – regular practices are run more like courses. Each concentrates on one or two methods, or on a specific ability range, so people know what to expect and they know they will get plenty of it. Participants (both 'students' & 'helpers') sign up to each one in advance. That makes planning possible, and again ensures that participants can get what they were expecting.

The Branch already has some experience of both these ideas. In the last year there have been a few elementary practices and some Surprise Major practices. In both cases the participants were agreed in advance, as they have also been for many years for the monthly daytime practices. So the question is whether we should extend the ideas to all Branch practices, replacing the traditional monthly 'take pot luck' practices.

## What could prevent it working?

Events only work if people take part in them, so would (enough) people take part in practices targeted in this way? If we just took those who attend traditional practices and eliminate those who don't need to develop their Bob Doubles, or don't want to try Kent, or can't ring Surprise, it is unlikely any event would be viable. The whole point of a targeted practice is to attract (more of) the people at whom it is targeted. So success depends on whether more members will make the effort to attend a practice focused on their needs than one where they don't know what they will or won't be able to ring.

Will members sign up to attend a practice in advance rather than leaving it until the day to make the decision? Obviously it is a bit more of a commitment, but it seems to work where we already do it. Occasionally events are cancelled because too few people are available, but that is better than wasting time turning up short, since the time can be used for other things.

## How should we proceed?

If we decide to run more targeted practices within the Branch there are several options to consider, for example: They could replace all or some of the monthly Saturday practices. The focus for each practice could be fixed in a rota or it could be varied in response to requests. The practices could continue on the third Saturday or some of them could be on a weekday evening. The date could be fixed or varied to suit the participants (the way we have previously organised training courses).

All of these (and possibly other) options can be considered but they all depend on whether enough members would like to benefit from targeted practices and would support them by participating.

Please discuss this within your band so that whoever represents you at the meeting on 15th November can make an informed contribution to the discussion.

*John Harrison (Chairman)*