



CATHEDRAL  
MUSIC TRUST

# A FUTURE FOR CATHEDRAL MUSIC

SUMMARY of FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

from the

MORE PARTNERSHIP REPORT

commissioned by

CATHEDRAL MUSIC TRUST

SEPTEMBER 2022

## INTRODUCTION

Cathedral music has an importance in British national life that goes far beyond its central role in Christian worship. It has developed into a symbol of Britishness and is regarded as one of the glories of this country's cultural heritage. It is cathedral choirs that are called upon at times of great national importance to set the mood for the nation, such as the Queen's funeral in September 2022. Participation in cathedral music has educational and developmental benefits for young people, in addition to the musical, artistic, and religious experiences involved.

However, cathedral music faces a long-term sustainability crisis. Cathedral choirs are expensive to run and are becoming increasingly difficult to manage successfully. Unless cathedrals directly address issues around participation and affordability, their musical offering will struggle to retain its reputation for excellence.

## THE RESEARCH BRIEF

More Partnership was commissioned in early 2022 to explore how the Cathedral Music Trust can allocate its resources to greatest effect, to advance its ambition to sustain and inspire the future of sacred music.

## METHODOLOGY

Through a review of practice and literature, workshops, interviews and the collation of new evidence, More Partnership established an evidence-based picture of the cathedral music scene and the challenges facing it and recommended specific steps for the Trust to take in order to contribute most effectively to the sustainability and health of the sector.

This paper summarises key aspects of More Partnership's full report and highlights areas for immediate action. All quotes are drawn from the report and are individual reflections, not necessarily the views of the Cathedral Music Trust.

## KEY FINDINGS

Four themes emerged from More Partnership's research as the strongest arguments about why cathedral music matters:

1. Spiritual transcendence
2. Importance in national life
3. Educational and personal development
4. Church worship and mission

---

*"The articulation of sense and soul must be the supreme achievement of the human being."  
Bob Geldof on why he cried when hearing the choir practising at Canterbury Cathedral*

---

### **Spiritual transcendence**

Cathedral music is a jewel to treasure. It is widely appreciated for its ability to stir a range of aspects of our humanity – emotional, sensual, spiritual, aural and visual. Musicians engage with the challenge of performing it, whilst listeners and worshippers are moved by its beauty and often by its setting.

---

*77% of people interviewed by More Partnership said that the transcendent quality of cathedral music was important.*

---

In addition to its central place in Christian worship, many people who love cathedral music do so without subscribing to the religious experience from which it sprang. This means that the Church is not the only quarter from which support comes. Indeed, there is strong engagement and backing from those interested in heritage, the intrinsic artistic value of the music, and its place in education – and whose religious backgrounds might not be Christian and who may not be religiously active.

The performance of music at such a consistently high standard and with such regularity in so many places across the UK and Ireland is an extraordinary cultural and artistic achievement. This is the result, not only of ability, but also sustained hard work by thousands of people each day and week. The infrastructure, skills, and knowledge behind its production would be almost impossible to replicate if lost.

---

*“It’s an encounter with beauty... lifting the mind, heart and soul.” (Interviewee)*

---

## **Importance in National Life**

The UK’s flagship cathedral choirs are renowned worldwide and consistently perform to the highest standards of excellence. Cathedral choirs are called upon at times of great national importance to set the mood for the nation, uniting people in the beauty that sacred choral and organ music provides. Even in an increasingly secular age, our national life is punctuated by sacred choral music.

---

*“Cathedral music provides a resource for the whole nation. No other nation sings this kind of music on the scale that the UK does.” (Interviewee)*

---

Cathedral music was a central part of televised services held in memory of the late Queen, including St Paul’s Cathedral, London, St Anne’s Cathedral, Belfast, St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff, Westminster Abbey and St George’s Chapel Windsor, and civic services were held in nearly every cathedral and abbey across the UK as well as in many churches. Every year, sung carol services in cathedrals and churches remain a cornerstone of many people’s Christmas celebrations.

## **Educational and personal development**

Participation in cathedral music has important educational and developmental benefits for young people, beyond the direct musical, artistic and religious experiences involved. Research shows that choristers gain transferable skills, including time management, confidence, teamwork, sensitivity, cooperation, concentration, patience, determination and emotional intelligence.

---

*“I owe my entire career to my experience as a chorister. My background in choral music has meant everything to me. It’s a fantastic grounding in music but it’s a discipline as well. I think you learn gravitas as a chorister, there’s a great dignity to it. It brings you into contact with a colossal range of literature, it’s very good for your maths, it’s a grounding in performance. Any child who has been a chorister is destined to have an interesting and fulfilling life.”*

*Alexander Armstrong, TV and Radio presenter*

---

Through education and partnership programmes, many cathedrals support the basic foundations of singing and music teaching in local schools, which can lead to opportunities for children to join a cathedral choir. Britain’s classical music sector draws significant talent from professional musicians trained in cathedral music programmes.

---

*“We should highlight more of the Church’s role as a national patron of music. Many of our best soloists come from cathedral music.” (Interviewee)*

---

## **Church worship and mission**

Cathedral music is central to Christian worship. Cathedral music, and in particular the service of choral evensong, has seen a sustained surge in popularity, even at a time of decreasing church attendance overall. A 2013 report noted that 75% of worshippers considered the choir important; 65% said the same about the sermon. Cathedral music is responsible for bringing many young people and families into the life of the church.

---

*“He who sings prays twice.” (Quotation widely attributed to St Augustine)*

---

There is no question that the vast majority of ‘performances’ of cathedral music are acts of worship for many of those present. It is also clear that there is a growing appreciation of the opportunities which cathedral music provides for people to engage with the numinous, with deep questions, and to do so in a ‘safe space’. This may explain the rise in the number of people attending choral services. Cathedral music brings alive biblical text and liturgy at the core of worship and offers an opportunity to engage with sacred music and spirituality without any demands being placed on the individual.

---

*“The choral tradition connects with people who are fed up with being preached at but haven’t given up on faith.” (Interviewee)*

---

## **CATHEDRAL MUSIC FACES A SUSTAINABILITY CRISIS**

The past two years have witnessed change at a speed and global scale that few could have foreseen. The challenge for cathedral music is how it can evolve and achieve real, sustained, and relevant impact in a changing society.

In most places where cathedral music is sung, there have been substantial changes in leadership and governance in the last quarter century and there have been several very positive and innovative changes in the way cathedral music is managed in a variety of settings. For example, governance and management structures within English Anglican cathedrals have been radically altered through the Cathedral Measure, first published in 1999 and updated in 2021; and a sea change in safeguarding practices has affected every setting in which children and vulnerable adults are present.

However, in cathedrals and churches steeped in so much tradition, the pressure to keep things as they’ve always been remains strong. This makes it hard to step back and imagine a future filled with excellent music but managed and staffed in a new way. As well as directors of music, at the centre of this challenge are deans, precentors, administrators, chief operating officers, church incumbents, college chaplains and others with day-to-day responsibility for maintaining the weekly routine of sung services. More Partnership research revealed that few of the people in those roles are trained to lead this kind of change management.

## More Partnership identified three elements as central to the future of cathedral music: Excellence, Participation and Affordability.

Each is important individually; together, they are a powerful set of interlinked factors that need to be balanced in harmony. These issues have a strong bearing on the question of chorister pathways into cathedral music – cited as a critical issue by 81% of those who took part in the research. It is essential that more cathedral choirs find effective and reliable ways of developing a more diverse supply of talented young people at a sustainable cost.

---

*“If we lose this tradition, it will be all but impossible to restart it.” (Interviewee)*

---

### Excellence

Cathedral music must be, or aspire to be, excellent. Its ability to inspire and its status as one of the glories of British culture and church life is directly connected to the calibre of the musical composition and performance. Excellence is also the key to attracting new choristers and other musicians from a thoroughly diverse base.

---

*“I remember singing as a chorister in Peterborough Cathedral, having won a music scholarship to go to school there, and realising for the first time in my life what true excellence was.”*

*David Lammy, MP*

---

- Cathedral music includes some of the finest expressions of singing in churches and of choral music. Its professional, dedicated choirs are among the elite of choral music worldwide.
- Musicians interviewed by More Partnership talked about excellence as a function of natural ability, sustained music tuition, sufficient practice and rehearsals, and ample opportunities to perform. In other words, excellent outcomes result from excellent processes. And a pre-requisite for this is excellent leadership.
- Excellence is something that can and should be aimed for by all who take part in cathedral music, whilst encompassing and welcoming a wide range of achievement. With the right leadership and process, excellence is a reasonable and feasible aspiration.
- The analogy of sport is instructive. ‘Elite sport’ is not at all a term of opprobrium. Rather, it describes those who through determination, hard work and talent reach the very top of their chosen field. It is a term which is celebrated and rewarded and attracts significant public funding. The rationale behind investment in elite sport is that sporting success leads to international prestige, a raising of spirits within the wider community, and an increase in participation among the general population. In the same way, cathedral choirs are at the apex of choral singing. They too should be celebrated and rewarded, and thereby attract significant funding.
- To demonstrate that they are elite but not elitist, cathedrals and major places of worship must be able to demonstrate a clear pathway from the grassroots of singing through to the pinnacle of cathedral choirs.

---

*There is absolutely no doubt the experience [of being a chorister] made me the cricketer I became. We were expected to learn quickly about the power of concentration and performing under pressure... there are parallels here with professional cricket... You are expected to be a team player, to commit to a common creed of dedication and self-discipline. The world is often watching... Music was similar to cricket in that we were judged collectively, but vulnerable to individual error...”*

*Alastair Cook, The Autobiography 2019*

---

## Participation

For cathedral music to have a secure future, the pathways for children, especially, must be expanded. More Partnership identified that the most common models – cathedral choirs linked with an independent school next door or those recruiting from local state schools – may fail to attract enough choristers of broad diversity. This has a knock-on effect on the development of adult musicians – directors of music, organists, singers and composers.

### Towards gender equality

- There has been significant progress towards gender equality. The number of cathedrals and major places of worship which do not make any provision for girls is rapidly dwindling and More Partnership's report noted that their position looks increasingly untenable from a legal and moral point of view. Most cathedral choirs recognise the importance and value not simply of making available opportunities for girl choristers but doing so on a parity with boy choristers. There is still work to do to achieve this aim and to ensure that opportunity, development, and pathways for boys' voices does not suffer in the process.
- Cathedral choirs have been slower to embrace female adults than to enrol girl choristers.
- Many places of worship have been deliberately broadening their repertoire to give more prominence to female and minority ethnic composers, but there is significant progress to be made.

---

*“In a lot of ways, singing is like sport. It boosts health, it's fun to take part in and can be full of adventures. But all the talent in the world won't make you an elite performer if you aren't willing to commit to training and working hard. And, until recently, women's involvement in professional sport has been severely limited. They have had to work very hard to prove that they are worthy of funding and that their performances are just as compelling and exciting and technically proficient as that of men. The tide is turning in sport: why not in singing?” The Guardian, 2018*

---

### Socio-economic and ethnic diversity

- The issue of diversity particularly as it relates to socioeconomic backgrounds comes to the fore when considering the role of cathedral choir schools. Choristers at half of the forty-two Anglican cathedrals in England plus Westminster Abbey attend an independent (fee-paying) school linked to their cathedral. Three cathedral choirs link with state-funded choir schools and the remaining nineteen recruit their choristers from local schools. Of the twenty Roman Catholic cathedrals in England, three have choir schools, of which only one is independent.
- The practice of linking an independent school with the cathedral choir is said to underpin excellence by allowing pupils to combine their studies with the demands of the specialist music programme; however, even with generous bursaries, school fees can make it difficult for a wide range of children to take part. In addition to financial cost, there are cultural and societal barriers to entry which may deter potential applicants.
- For cathedral choirs that recruit from across local state schools, the significant decline of music education in state education means that many young people are not receiving the requisite musical training or skills required to deliver excellence swiftly.
- There is a risk that cathedral music becomes polarised between well-endowed choral foundations with linked choir schools which produce music of the highest quality but are perceived as exclusive, and choirs which recruit from across local state schools but have limited resources to enable their choirs to achieve similar standards of excellence.
- Whichever chorister pathway a child is on, there is increasing evidence that families of choristers with no previous experience of cathedral music or church life can find it hard to understand expectations. It is therefore critical that all cathedrals put in place additional support so that choristers and their families can adjust to expectations and achieve excellence.

- More Partnership noted that only limited empirical data is currently available on ethnic diversity within cathedral choirs.

---

*“The impact and beauty of cathedral music simply must not be confined to such a small proportion of the population – widening participation and increasing engagement must be a priority, to amplify the great effects, the relevance, and the value of this spectacular endeavour.” Interviewee*

---

## Diversity is essential

- Diversity is essential for a sustainable future across the whole sector. An elite performance will only deserve unequivocal celebration and reward if it stems from an opportunity open to all.
- There is much to do to be genuinely inclusive, and cathedrals, schools and choirs must enhance their efforts to reach those most likely to miss out on advanced training opportunities offered by cathedral music. Working to expand accessible pathways into cathedral choirs will strengthen the sector’s reputation for excellence.
- Cathedral choirs embracing the challenge of widening participation play an important role in the levelling-up agenda. Many cathedrals put significant effort into community engagement and partnership activities to spread the joy of singing, to contribute to basic music education and to make cathedral music more accessible.

## Affordability

Cathedral music is expensive. It relies on highly trained professionals and is extremely time-intensive, requiring regular rehearsals and performances. It strains budgets, leading to debates about value for money, cost versus benefit, and financial sustainability.

- The ecosystem that supports cathedral music is complex and requires substantial funding. Unlike their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, UK cathedrals receive no regular state funding. Even before Covid-19, cathedrals’ music departments were under pressure to save money and the pandemic has had disastrous consequences for cathedral finances, and thus cathedrals’ ability to fund their music.
- In 2014 it was estimated that the average cost of running a cathedral choir was £250,000, but the range varies hugely. In 2020 Westminster Abbey reported £3.3 million was spent on music; at the other end of the scale, Coventry Cathedral budgeted to spend just over £50,000 on music in 2022. But More Partnership’s research showed that figures on the costs of choirs are not easily comparable and there is no financial benchmark.
- The shock to cathedral finances caused by the pandemic has implications for the longer-term sustainability of cathedral music, particularly within the new context for the governance of cathedrals as established in the Cathedrals Measure 2021. There is a critical need for newly appointed trustees of cathedral boards to have full understanding and appreciation of the fundamental place of music within the life and worship of a cathedral.
- Supporting choristers, and in particular, the practice of linking a cathedral choir with a fee-paying choir school (as half of Anglican cathedrals do) is especially challenging financially. Cathedrals will need to grapple with this issue when formulating their future strategy, seeking to balance cost, quality, and inclusivity of their choirs.

---

### ***Restructuring of Belfast Cathedral Music Department (2022)***

*Belfast Cathedral made the decision to restructure its music department ‘owing to the difficult financial circumstances in which Belfast Cathedral continues to find itself.’ Their statement noted that ‘This will include a move away from a paid, professional adult choir to a voluntary adult choir. In addition, the full-time role of Director of Music will be made redundant and will be replaced by a part-time Cathedral Choir Director.’*

---

## MORE PARTNERSHIP'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO CATHEDRAL MUSIC TRUST

The key to ensuring a thriving future for the cathedral music tradition is strengthening the pathways of the musicians who bring it to life – by promoting excellence and widening participation at an affordable, sustainable cost.

The Trust is strongly placed to influence and support the future of sacred music in the UK. This music matters – to people who are searching for transcendence and beauty, to those who treasure this sublime aspect of Britain's cultural heritage, to children developing artistically and personally, and to the church from whose spiritual life it has emerged.

### **Reflecting on these findings, More Partnership recommends Cathedral Music Trust focuses on three initial areas of impact. These are:**

- Build an even stronger case for the support of cathedral music, by collating and highlighting evidence about its impact and value across a wide range of measures.
- Support increased socio-economic diversity and inclusion in the participation, appreciation, and leadership of cathedral music.
- Foster even better equipped leaders for cathedral music.

---

*“It's vital to properly equip those deeply engaged with the communities participating in cathedral music – the people who have management responsibility but are also intimately involved in the governance of the cathedral and with wider matters. These people are the lynchpins for the future of the music.” Interviewee*

---

### **Within these three areas of impact, the report presents several specific recommendations; chief among them are:**

- Develop strategic partnerships across the sector to equip church leadership with the necessary expertise to address these critical challenges as well as promote the importance of cathedral music both in worship and across society.
- Focus financial and educational resources to help strengthen pathways for choristers and adult musicians into cathedral music, with a particular focus on improving socio-economic diversity and inclusion across the sector, whilst delivering excellence at an affordable cost.
- Encourage learning and sharing of best practice, especially from choirs which have successfully recruited young and adult musicians from a wider population than has historically been the case.
- Take a long-term view to sustainability, with the ability to adapt as learning across the sector increases.

## IN CLOSING

More Partnership's report makes it clear that the way forward will require collective responsibility – and collaborative action. The Cathedral Music Trust is ready to continue playing a pivotal role in convening, mobilising and enabling the networks and organisations that wish to contribute to this.

## Thank you to the following contributors for their time and expertise:

Peter Allwood, Chair of Cathedral Music Trust  
Sooty Asquith, former Trustee of Cathedral Music Trust  
The Rt Revd Robert Atwell, Bishop of Exeter  
Ben Bradshaw MP  
Harriet Capaldi, Director, Genesis Foundation  
Andrew Carwood, DoM, St Paul's Cathedral  
Tansy Castledine, DoM, Peterborough Cathedral  
The Revd Dr Stephen Cherry, Dean of King's College Cambridge  
Harry Christophers CBE, President of Cathedral Music Trust  
David Coulthard, Controller, Chichester Cathedral  
Stephen Darlington MBE, Emeritus Professor of Music, University of Oxford  
Cathy Dew, Director of Impact & Delivery at Cathedral Music Trust  
Katherine Dienes-Williams, DoM, Guildford Cathedral  
The Very Revd Adrian Dorber, Dean of Lichfield  
Rosemary Downey, former Trustee of Cathedral Music Trust  
Mike Eastwood, COO, Liverpool Cathedral  
James Emberley, DCMS  
The Rev'd Jeremy Fletcher, Vicar, St John-at-Hampstead  
Christopher Gower, former Trustee of Cathedral Music Trust  
Jason Groves, Trustee of Cathedral Music Trust  
The Revd Canon Victoria Johnson, Precentor, York Minster  
Guy Hayward, Co-Founder & Trustee, Choral Evensong Trust  
Justine Horseman-Sewell, COO, Southwark Cathedral  
Ian Keatley, DoM, Southwark Cathedral  
Maurice Kenwrick-Piercy, Founder, Diamond Fund for Choristers  
Kathryn King, Faculty of Music, Oxford University  
Sarah King, Executive Director, AEC  
James Lancelot, Trustee of Cathedral Music Trust  
Jonathan Macdonald, Chair-elect of Cathedral Music Trust  
Clive Marriot, Headmaster, Salisbury Cathedral School  
James McConnell, DoM, St Peter's Cathedral Belfast

Matthew Mills, Head of Fundraising, Durham Cathedral  
The Very Revd David Monteith, Dean of Leicester  
Claire Moriarty DBE, CEO, Citizens Advice  
Glyn Morgan MBE, CEO, Hereford Cathedral Perpetual Foundation  
Natasha Morris, Development Director at Cathedral Music Trust  
Nigel Morris, Assistant DoM, St Chad's, Birmingham  
The Rev'd Canon James Mustard, Precentor at Exeter Cathedral and Trustee of Cathedral Music Trust  
Andrew Nethsingha, DoM, St John's College, Cambridge  
Isobel Pinder, Trustee and Chair of Impact & Delivery at Cathedral Music Trust  
Theo Platt, Deputy COO, Gloucester Cathedral  
Dr Eve Poole, formerly Third Church Estates Commissioner  
Elizabeth Preece, Researcher, Bristol University  
David Price, DoM, Portsmouth Cathedral  
Gavin Ralston, Trustee and Chair of Finance & Audit at Cathedral Music Trust  
Susanne Reid, Administrator, Christ Church Cathedral Dublin  
The Revd Dr Matthew Salisbury, CofE National Liturgy Advisor  
Ben Saunders, DoM, Diocese of Leeds  
The Rt Revd Marcus Stock, RC Bishop of Leeds  
Matthew Swann, CEO, City of London Sinfonia  
Simon Toyne, Executive Director of Music, David Ross Education Trust  
The Very Rev'd Stephen Waine, Dean of Chichester Cathedral  
William Wallis, DCMS  
The Most Rev'd John Wilson, RC Archbishop of Southwark  
The Revd Lucy Winkett, Rector, St James' Piccadilly

### More Partnership

Dr Louise Ashley  
Adrian Beney  
Nik Miller  
Joanna Storrar