

Cathedrals' Liturgy and Music Group

Suggested guidelines for appointing Directors of Music in Cathedrals

1. Making an appointment

The following document is a useful checklist for Chapters appointing Directors of Music in Cathedrals. The appointment of a Director of Music allows a Chapter the opportunity to engage in a rigorous, open, discerning and fair process to recruit for its own individual needs.

At the outset, a Chapter should think about and define clearly what is required from their Director of Music post. This will give the necessary focus to find the best person to take up the post. It is deemed good practice in modern business to advertise all posts.

A process for Chapter:

Each stage in the process requires adequate time – making a wrong decision due to a rushed process can have long lasting consequences. A month or even a term with a stand-in Director of Music, or a chance for the Assistant Director of Music to direct the music in an interregnum in order to gain daily experience with the Choir, can be beneficial.

1) Budget for recruitment, and review the figure (inclusive of advertising costs, the engagement of one or more external advisers (see Appendix on page), travel costs for candidates, hospitality costs, CRB clearances and any other possible costs) annually.

2) Chapter should discuss the current and future role of music within the Cathedral, reviewing the current Director of Music role and looking towards future development. When defining the post of Director of Music, Chapter should consider the needs of the Cathedral in order of priority.

3) Chapter should select and approach an appointments panel. This panel should be inclusive of an external advisor (see page 4).

4) The following documents should be drawn up and approved by Chapter:

- a recruitment strategy, including number of candidates to be shortlisted
- a job specification
- a person specification (separating out 'essential' and 'desirable' skills)
- the terms and conditions of the post
- background information for candidates
- a covering letter to interested parties
- a letter for referees asking them to include particular information
- a letter for short-listed candidates
- a timetable (for internal use) for all the stages of the appointment process

Documents must be clear to applicants.

5) The panel should clarify who will respond to candidates' questions throughout the process, what role (if any) the current post holder is expected to play (e.g. meet candidates to answer specific questions on interview day, respond to prior enquiries, show short listed candidates round their cathedral accommodation, etc.).

The panel should make arrangements for the interview process including dates, room hire and check the availability of all necessary parties (including the Choir and music staff if required). The panel should arrange places for the candidates to stay, if appropriate, and ensure any necessary meals are provided.

6) Advertise the post.

The Church Times is the most popular place for church musicians to search: Classical Music Magazine is also viewed and might help widen the field beyond those already in church music. Both publications have online jobs sections.

Other publications and/ or websites may also be considered.

The appointments panel may wish to send notification of the vacancy to those who may know suitable candidates, asking them to encourage those candidates to apply.

The panel may wish to send notification of the vacancy to particular groups of potential applicants (e.g. assistant organists, directors of church, college or other choirs of a good standard, together with any appropriate internal candidates).

The panel may wish to employ head hunters or use other independent agencies.

A closed process without advertisement may involve imposing a single candidate into an appointment. This may alienate the wider profession but also musicians, including any assistant organists, within the Cathedral itself. The effect of this may make the work of a new post holder harder. If the chosen candidate is a professionally respected musician with a significant track record the decision may be partially understood.

7) Receive and document applications, acknowledging their receipt. Allow for the proper scrutiny of all applications by both the panel and the external advisor. Draw up a long list of candidates, allowing the selection of a short list to be called for interview. Sometimes all candidates may be met at long list stage as well as a smaller group at short list stage.

8) Ensure that all CVs and other documentation for candidates are properly read by the panel and references taken up in enough time before interview.

9) Ensure that all the skills deemed necessary for the post are tested in some way, whether through qualifications, references or at interview. Allow all candidates to follow the same process. Ensure that the process encourages the panel to balance a candidate's track record (CV, references, recordings, etc.) against how they perform at interview. A candidate who can 'wow' a panel for 15 minutes is not always one who can build or work with a choir over several years. The panel may look for evidence of a proven track record, even if in a different discipline. Panels should be prepared to take a broad view which balances the need for a secure appointment with the importance of inspiration and talent.

Consider that the choir-training part of the interview process may lead towards a 'performance' at the end of the rehearsal element, to show not just what candidates might work on but also how they would prepare for a performance, and their time-management skills.

For some senior posts it may be inappropriate to have practical tests of choir-training. For this to be the case the track record of all candidates must be known and demonstrable to all on the panel. It will sometimes be easier to make decisions on this aspect of the interview process once the short-list is known.

10) After interview:

- The panel should first decide whether any candidate(s) does not meet the criteria for appointment at the necessary level
- The panel should discuss the performance of each candidate on each test and to see in which order the remaining candidates best meet the criteria (thereby creating an alternative course of action if the preferred candidate does not accept the post)
- The appointments panel should make a final decision
- Offer the post to the preferred candidate stating the agreed starting date, and receive their answer in writing
- If the post is declined move on to the next placed candidate(s)
- When a positive answer has been secured in writing contact the remaining candidates stating that they have not been successful, thanking them for competing for the post, and providing travel expenses
- If none of the acceptable candidates accepts the post, reconsider the post perhaps with the help of a further advisor(s) to understand what has gone wrong. Decide whether to delay appointment until a different field may be available or whether to recast the appointment so as to be more attractive to candidates
- Agree a contract with the successful candidate
- Identify the areas in which the newly appointed post holder will require help and discuss these with them. Discuss the transition with them and, if appropriate, the current post holder. Introduce them to the people they will need to know to do their job, and give them a comprehensive list of contact information (subject to usual data requirements) so that they can forge relationships and think ahead. If the job is not fulltime, consider whether they need help finding additional work. Offer help and local knowledge in identifying housing, and schooling for the new post holder's children, as appropriate. Help the post holder build an accurate picture of the situation into which they are coming
- Publicise the appointment in the cathedral and local community as appropriate
- When the candidate is in place, follow best employment practice, to include a regular programme of reviews (appraisals) with the post holder, with reasonable, agreed and documented targets, and clarity about the particular support Chapter will provide the post holder in helping to reach them. An appraiser must have undertaken a training course on how to appraise staff.

11) The post should be discussed and reviewed periodically by Chapter as the needs of the Cathedral change.

- Contracts and other employment documents should be discussed and if necessary updated regularly in line with employment law, following consultation, discussion and the agreement of both parties

- In service training should be provided, and should address any needs identified in any review processes
- Salary should be reviewed on an annual basis, recognising new skills developed or experience gained

2. Skills and qualities required for Director of Music posts

Some or all of the following skills and qualities may be deemed important in any particular Director of Music post:

A candidate should have:

- Strong musicianship to facilitate music-making to the highest levels and to inspire, motivate and instil respect in choristers, lay clerks and organist colleagues
- Ability to train a choir
- Keyboard skills
- Knowledge of vocal technique
- Ability to give strong leadership
- Ability to manage a music department, to communicate and delegate, together with any particular skills needed in this post (remembering that some of these can be learnt)
- Good interpersonal skills
- Contextual knowledge of liturgy, repertoire and a feel for cathedral worship
- Sympathy with the ministry of the Cathedral, which in some cases may involve playing a direct role in matters of faith
- A vision for the future of the music department and its ministry
- Suitability to work with young people, compliant with Child Protection laws

Successful appointments may involve appointing someone who is very good at two or three principal requirements of a post, whilst ensuring that within the Music Department and the Cathedral sufficient support and staffing is given to cover all desired elements of the post.

3. References

At least three references should be sought for a senior post such as Director of Music. A reference from the candidate's current employer should be sought, and candidates should have the opportunity, if necessary, to explain in their application why they cannot or do not wish to have such a referee act for them so that the panel can form a clear picture of the candidate's career and work. The request for information from referees should draw attention to any particular details referees should supply (e.g. suitability to work with young people, how closely the candidate meets certain requirements of the post) so that the panel has clear evidence by which to compare the suitability of different candidates. If it is felt that references obtained are inadequate, members of the panel should feel able to approach the referee(s) for further clarification and if necessary to ask direct questions.

4. The role of an external Advisor

An external Advisor would ideally be engaged to help with the process from its beginning. An Advisor must be appropriately remunerated. Advisors can help ensure that the proposed details of the post look reasonable (e.g. to potential candidates), that the post is

suitably advertised, that the merits of different candidates are properly discussed during the short-listing process and that the interview process extracts all the information the panel will need to make its choice.

The Advisor should be someone who has experience of working in a similar or related post or who has worked closely with the holder of a similar post. He/she should be someone whom the likely field of candidates will respect and hold to be impartial. When engaging an Advisor it should be made clear to him/her that he/she is expected to offer to withdraw if a conflict of interests arises as a result of the short-listing process.

A process may involve two Advisors with some difference in background and approach, so that a panel can be advised from a variety of perspectives.

The Advisor should express judgements on the suitability of candidates in all aspects of the post, and should help Chapter to see what qualities and what areas of inexperience each candidate might bring to the post. Having done so, he/she should then allow Chapter to form its opinion, guided by his/her suggestions. Chapter is the body which must make the appointment as the Employer. If Chapter widely diverges from the views of the Advisor he / she is then not able to vouch for the decision reached. It is therefore in Chapter's interest to make the requirements of the appointment clear at every stage, so that both the Advisor and Chapter view candidates' suitability from the same angle.

5. The appointment of non-organists to Director of Music posts

Candidates who have served as assistant organists may have developed a portfolio of skills that are directly relevant and transferable to a Director of Music post. Serving as an assistant organist may confirm ability in several areas. Not all these areas may match a Director of Music job specification. In cathedrals where musicians are well trained, assistants should have been encouraged and supported to develop all kinds of skills required of Directors of Music.

Whilst there are instances where the appointment of non-organists has worked well, such appointments may raise questions of career progression in a profession with a relatively small field of potential jobs. If a large number of senior posts go to people who have not worked their way through the profession as organists, it becomes harder for those within the profession to move on. If young organists do not see a viable career progression there is a danger they will not apply to cathedrals for organ scholarships and assistant organist posts, and cathedral music will be poorer in quality as a result.

However, it is rare for those appointing to a post in any profession to restrict their field of potential candidates artificially. What should be paramount is the quality of the candidates chosen for interview, and their ability to meet the requirements of the post. Crucial to the process is defining what is needed in a Director of Music before sending the details out to interested potential candidates. It is unlikely that all cathedrals will need to prioritise organ playing over choir training, general musical, personal and management/leadership skills, though no doubt some will. Some cathedrals will be able to deal with the lack of organ playing skills in the appointed candidate through other means (e.g. a small amount of finance to pay deputies to cover occasional playing duties, or a redefinition of roles within the music department)

If the job description does not require candidates to be organists, it is sometimes felt to be harder to find a vehicle to measure the important criterion of 'musicianship' at interview.

There is no reason, however, why organists, singers, pianists and any other type of musician could not equally be required to perform to the panel at interview. Given that a Director of Music post is about directing the performance of others, it is important to find some way of demonstrating the musical vision and performance of candidates, whether via test or track record.

Cathedrals will want to look at the degree of keyboard skills applicants will need. In most cathedrals it is extremely unlikely that a rehearsal pianist will be available to play for every rehearsal the Director of Music takes. Although rehearsing without the piano is ideal in some forms of music and to encourage confidence, rhythmic singing and a keen sense of pitch, it is often unhelpful in less tonal forms of music or where pitch is gained from organ leads. It is important that any necessary keyboard skills are tested in some way, whether via some form of diploma accreditation or through the tests at interview. Candidates could be required to accompany a portion of their rehearsal at the piano, or be given some separate form of keyboard test at interview at a level appropriate to the requirements of the post.

Cathedrals will want to weigh on the one hand the skills that some non-organists have in choir training and singing technique with those honed as an assistant organist, bearing in mind also the experience in music in general and church music in particular that different candidates have. It is illogical that any Director of Music post should discriminate against organists (i.e. where those conducting the process have made a prior decision that they will definitely appoint a non-organist), and it should be hoped that assistant organists would be suitable candidates to apply for all Director of Music posts except where, for senior posts, a proven track record in regular choral direction might be set as a priority in the criteria for appointment). It is important to challenge the myth that organists are not good at conducting: as with any discipline there is a range of ability across the field. At the same time, it is clear that the appointment of non-organists has in some cases brought high quality choral and vocal training skills to particular cathedrals. This should be welcomed as a benefit to the profession as a whole.

All outcomes are possible if the process is entered into in the spirit of finding the most appropriate person for the post. Wherever possible, Cathedrals should remain open to the possibility of different models, depending on the field of candidates who apply. The 'type' of candidate is not as relevant as the skills, transferable skills and track record of each particular candidate.

6. The appointment of assistant organists as internal candidates for Director of Music posts

Assistant organists should feel able to apply for advertised Director of Music posts which will follow a rigorous, open and transparent appointments process. Chapter should be aware of the following negative aspects of appointing an Assistant Organist in post to the vacant Director of Music post without advertisement of that post or due interview process:

- Within the Choir the Director of Music may be perceived not to have been properly selected, leading to a lack of respect for the appointee; his/her hands may then be tied with regard to making desirable reforms and changes
- Colleagues within the profession may not know whether he/she is competent in the job or not, with the complication that some of them may themselves have

wished to compete for the post: these factors can undermine relationships and support from peers and colleagues

- A relationship between the new Director of Music and Chapter, initially rosy, may prove difficult in time, either if members of Chapter feel that he/she 'owes them' for promoting him/her without an open process and use this to block requests for resources or flexibility, or if the music is less successful (or even more successful!) than Chapter envisaged when making the appointment. New members of Chapter may view the Director of Music differently to their colleagues who were involved in the appointment process
- If there are problems as a result of poor performance, Chapter looks not only to have made the wrong decision but also to have done so without a robust, open process
- Rumour suggesting in some cases that the Director of Music is not up to the job, whether true or not, weakens aspects of the music at the Cathedral including the recruitment of lay clerks and organists
- Some disaffected choir members may leave, weakening the team
- Training may not be offered in areas which the appointee needs, because his/her needs have not been assessed through an interview process. The new Director of Music may unintentionally be set up to fail
- The new post holder, particularly if not as strong as he/she is thought to be by Chapter, may not be further promoted and may remain at his/her Cathedral for longer than is desirable for either himself/herself or Chapter
- A future Chapter may have to deal with issues of poor performance and may even have to remove the Director of Music from his/her post unless they can be helped to improve
- When the post finally becomes vacant the Cathedral cannot attract the strong candidates they might have done if the Choir has been left in poorer shape than it should have been

7. Conclusion

Recruiting responsibly for senior cathedral positions is crucial if cathedrals are to fulfil their ministry to best advantage. It is in the interests of all organisations to design rigorous, fair, open, discerning and transparent processes to ensure that the best candidates are encouraged to apply, are short-listed, interviewed and appointed. The Church has an additional theological and ethical imperative to act fairly and to offer to God the best talents it can.

It is understood that each Cathedral must act to make the best possible appointment to meet its own needs. In doing so via a well-run and open process it is also supporting the morale, training and development, fluidity and career progression of the whole cathedral music profession, which benefits the Church's ministry in many different ways. Every time a Cathedral uses a closed or flawed process, or creates the perception of one, it is in danger of compromising the wider ministry of cathedral music as well as its own ministry.

Cathedral musicians have no automatic right to career progression, and must work hard to nurture and improve their performance throughout their careers like those in all other professions. While much of this development comes through experience and activity in post, some also comes through training, renewal of ideas, adaptability to new requirements and needs, and openness to change, which must be balanced with promoting or sometimes defending the quality of what is offered and ensuring suitable resourcing for what is

undertaken. Those who work in this way to serve in the musical ministry of cathedrals deserve to be treated with the respect that open appointments processes and good employment practices demonstrate.

A Chapter which considers the wider impact of its decisions, and follows a fair and accountable process in appointing for director of music and other posts, promotes the development of the Cathedral music profession to its own benefit and the benefit of the wider ministry of the Church. It also ensures that it can defend itself against any subsequent problems if a poor appointment is made. Most obviously in doing so it gives itself the best chance of making an inspired and secure appointment and developing music within its Cathedral as a fit tool for the worship of God.