

# Birmingham Universities Society recruits freshers

*The Birmingham University society is 70 years old. We began 2024 with 4 students and 4 local ringers that supported us occasionally. Since then we have successfully recruited and retained 15 new student ringers and have an average practice night attendance of 19.*



As the 2023/4 academic year was coming to an end we realised nearly all of our ringers were graduating and moving away. We decided a large-scale recruitment and retention approach was required to save the society. Our plans started early in the summer, by considering everything we would need for success. We produced leaflets, created a social media presence and physically prepared the tower including a thorough spring clean just before the first taster session.

We booked the Touring Tower for the Aston University Freshers Fair, and working with the Central Council, local ringers and the Vice Chancellor's office allowed us to recruit at Aston for the first time. The ART University Recruitment package and the St Martin's Guild were vital in allowing us to fund the mobile belfry.

We used four large roller banners which increased our professional look. 1000 Leaflets were designed and printed (we ran out!) We were frequently asked in our first week of recruiting about the cost. It hadn't occurred to us before that this was a significant factor to students, so our second batch of 500 leaflets and the social media posts were updated to make it clear bellringing is nearly free. The leaflets' call to action was to follow the newly created Instagram account.

This new approach resulted in 44 students attending the initial 3 taster sessions. We

have subsequently had 6 other interested students come to practice nights, 4 because of seeing our social media posts and 2 were new recruits bringing their flatmates along.

Our lack of affiliation with the student union at the University of Birmingham and Aston University, due to low numbers, has made it significantly more challenging to advertise to new students. We reached out to the union at UoB who (after some arm twisting and begging) offered us advertising on their website. Leveraging these collaborations with the church, local towers, the St Martin's Guild, the Student Union, and ringers with university connections have been key components in our success this year.

Over the summer, we created an Instagram account and added photos from the last couple of years to demonstrate the society was not brand new and had many established events. A new WhatsApp group has been setup to communicate with the recruits, and it is extensively used.



This has really helped bond the group, establishing good friendships, and some of them are even living together next year. We continue to use our new social media presence on Instagram and Facebook, and we regularly receive messages on Instagram from someone new asking if they can come along.

The new recruits have been able to attend a weekly practice night and an extra focussed session each week. At the start of the year both were 1-2-1 handling sessions, but they have quickly progressed to the point the sessions are now mostly Rounds and Call Changes with Plain Hunt for the more advanced. Because there are so many recruits, they aren't all able to be on the end of a rope at the same time, so we have used this time to explain the theory of Call Changes and Plain

Hunt, and teach them handbells. They have also all been taught how to call changes and had a go even before they could handle a bell themselves. This translates into extremely rapid progress once they have mastered bell control, because they already understand the theory required.

---

**we stopped the society  
from dying by recruiting  
more members than any  
year previously**

---

Finding ways to keep them stretched, even when we can't provide the rope time, has been essential. We decided to have a hot chocolate and biscuits break, it cost less than £5 but completely distracted from the fact they weren't getting much ringing. Every time we ask the recruits if they would like to attend another event it is met with great enthusiasm. Many have asked us questions about bell ringing outside of BUSCR. We have organised a Halloween and Christmas social, quiz night, curry and board games night, and they have been highly successful with an average attendance of 21.

## Structured training

At the start of the year we did not have any experienced, confident teachers, so we sought guidance from the Birmingham School of Bell Ringing, and three of us attended an ART Module 1 course. All current students were encouraged to be involved with the teaching, whether that was handling or handbells. It required us all to upskill quickly to ensure we gave the new recruits a really good experience.

Every week there are at least three sessions at the student tower, Edgbaston, and there is normally also a trip to Selly Oak or Moseley practice with a subset of the recruits.

We have developed a group of local helpers that are happy to come and support us. We run handling sessions every Friday, and Saturday or Sunday afternoon. A quarter peal is always organised after the extra handling sessions at the weekend, helping attract the teachers and helpers while also providing a regular schedule to stretch the original students.

Some students support local practices and service ringing at Selly Oak and Moseley. The local bands reciprocate by making up our numbers for quarters and service ringing, and allowing us to use their bells for more learner rope time.

We now have a template for recruitment. We know what worked and what didn't. We also already have recruitment materials which just needs to be updated for future years. With small tweaks and improvements we are confident for a streamlined recruitment process next academic year.

A significant factor in our success has been the considerable support from the Edgbaston church staff. The vicar has also passed through a few of our practices and commented how nice it was to see the church so lively and fun. This strong relationship has allowed us to use the bells on 3 or 4 days a week to maximise our progress.

## 2025

During 2024 the objectives of the band had to shift primarily to R&CCs. Despite this, a large amount of effort was made to upskill the new recruits quickly, meaning our main focus for 2025 has been on getting QP firsts for trebling, tenoring and inside. This has meant that in 2025 as a society, we have rung 33 QPs involving a total of 32 ringers with 68 firsts from BUSCR members.

## Training members to teach new recruits

In addition, there was a continuing focus on recruitment and retention. We wanted to ensure that a situation like 2024 didn't happen again. At the beginning of the next academic year, we had only 2 students left who would be able to teach the new recruits, so we decided that it would be wise to increase this

number by hosting another M1 ART Teacher Training course and sending 4 more of our members on it.

This was incredibly useful, as by the end of it the 4 students were taught a range of techniques and exercises to use while teaching. As a result, almost all the teaching in 2025 has been done without help from local ringers and we've been able to run more handling sessions as we are not restricted by availability.



*Practice night at Edgbaston*

## Keeping members engaged

Keeping people ringing is almost as important as getting them to start. Over the past year, we've tried to ensure that the society runs plenty of practices where people can stretch themselves and organise plenty of social events so people stay engaged. Over the course of the year, we have provided 47 additional practices beyond the regular weekly practice and service ringing. These are invite-only, but we keep a rota so that people as many members as possible are included.



BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITIES  
SOCIETY OF CHANGE RINGERS

***The Sarah Beacham 2025 ART Youth Award winner***

*Sponsored by: Sarah Beacham Memorial Trust*

***Joint Winner: 2026 ART Award for Band or Cluster of the Year. Sponsored by: AbelSim***

### Further information

The Association Ringing Teachers and Learning the Ropes:  
<https://bellringing.org/>

The Mobile Belfries Trust:  
<https://www.mobilebelfries.org/>

*The Mobile Belfries Trust  
Registered Charity 1126164*