

Strategy and sustainability: early findings from the independent review

Introduction

In the six months from April to September 2019 we carried out an independent review of The Boys' Brigade's most recent Strategic Plan to inform the development of the next one. A representative range of people from all levels of BB UK and Republic of Ireland took part, with over 2400 survey responses, 19 interviews and three focus groups taking place. This short paper presents a summary of the findings for sharing across the BB network.

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Achievements and future priorities

Achievements from 2013-2018 included sustaining the organisation's passion and commitment; the under-11's programme; developing training and resources; the mentoring programme in Wales; OBM being rolled out and used; and the Raising the Bar campaign.

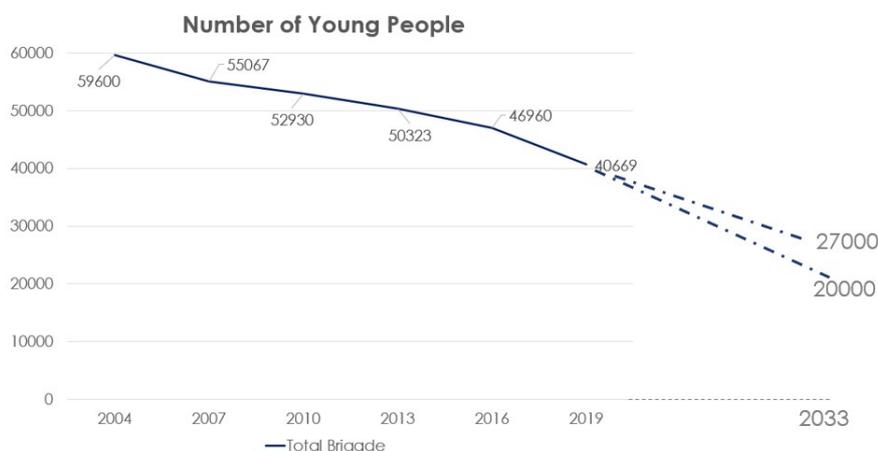
The most important priorities for the next three to five years identified were:

- Programme resources (56% of people)
- Recruiting and developing leaders/volunteers (40%)
- Membership and growth (39%)
- Retaining a focus on faith (31%)
- Raising profile (28%)

In summary, the recent focus on quality, growth and voice has begun to make a difference, but there needs to be more of it. I recommend keeping these priorities, with some suggested rebalancing of their focus – see below.

Growth

With a 32% decline in the number of young people (19,000) across the country in the last 13 years, the membership situation is now critical. If this trend continues over the next 13 years to the BB 150th anniversary, numbers will be between 20,000-27,000 (currently 40,600).



Urgent action is needed. Overall there is a commitment to change, and for this to be as inclusive as possible. But many people believe that if there are leaders or companies that aren't able to adapt, they could be left behind.

'We try to please too many people rather than just saying, this is what we're doing.' (Survey)

Quality

In the survey, less than half of people (48%) rated provision at a Company level as 'high' or 'very high' quality. 88% of survey respondents were in agreement that improving quality is the key to the organisation's future.

It was suggested that quality can be improved by focusing on:

- Leaders – they are the people who really influence quality.
- Programme ideas and resources that make leaders' jobs easier.
- Training – e.g. companies and battalions pooling resources and providing training for all leaders, including regular refresher training.
- Battalions supporting companies through visits and practice sharing.
- Standardisation – people cherish their freedom and autonomy, but some standardisation is still needed – and achievable.

'Companies need to see more involvement from Battalions/districts. Battalions and districts need to offer companies and leaders more support and advice'
(Survey)

'If we are to succeed and improve quality, there has got to be a standard that we can get to, a quality mark.' (Survey)

Voice

Growth and Quality are easy to understand. Voice was less clear, but just as important. It helps to support:

- Relevance: listening and responding to the voice of young people.
- Recruitment and retention: young people spreading the word with their peers
- The next generation of young leaders.

An unexpected theme to emerge in the survey and interviews was succession planning. Many senior leaders don't feel they have people around them who can step up and take over, so they don't move on. But if they don't move on, the next generation won't be able to step up. Addressing this Catch 22 situation is vital for the organisation's future. This could be done by taking a two-pronged approach to succession planning: supporting senior leaders to plan for their futures and retaining, then building the capacity of, the next generation of leaders.

'The moment you get a role...you should be thinking of who is going to replace you and you should be mentoring people to have the skills to take over'
(Interview)

We are preparing a full report on the review which will be presented to the Executive in October. For now, two final quotes succinctly sum up the challenges facing the organisation – and give clues to how they can be addressed.

'We are an organisation in crisis, and if we don't change what we are doing drastically soon, we won't exist. That is the harsh reality.'
(Focus group)

'If you can stick to the foundation of what an organisation stands for, there are a lot of years left in the organisation.' (Interview)