2022 Company Census

Analysis Report

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Contents

1 Executive Summary

- ❖ The census saw a high level of engagement from Companies, with around 800 respondents.
- ❖ There is evidence of progress in relation to the strategic objectives of enhancing quality and consistency of offering throughout the organisation.
- ❖ A key factor in raising programme quality has been the impact of programme resources provided by headquarters. These are widely recognised as having had a positive impact on planning, delivery and quality of activities.
- ❖ An ongoing challenge is a shortage of leaders or lack of leadership experience. This is likely to have a knock-on impact on the quality of programme on offer. The strategic focus on raising standards in this area appears well placed.
- ❖ Census data seems to indicate a fairly wide disparity in activities offered. This might be explained, to some extent, by the way activities are categorised at local level.
- ❖ Availability and suitability of premises do not appear to be significant factors where Companies are struggling. Similarly, there is no evidence that financial burdens are a significant factor affecting Company health.
- ❖ Encouragement can be drawn from the growth in numbers experienced by many Anchors and Juniors groups. Also, more Companies feel positive about the coming years than those who believe that they will be weaker or will have closed. Optimism is generally based on improvements in programme quality and enhanced leadership performance.
- ❖ In the older age groups many Companies continue to experience decline, with around one third considering themselves to be struggling or at risk of closure. Many of these highlight leadership deficiencies as a significant factor.
- ❖ The most effective channel for recruitment is word of mouth. This suggests that young people enjoy the content and quality of activities and are keen to share with others.
- ❖ Relationships with local churches vary widely. In some cases involvement is high, while in others it seems limited to an annual parade.
- ❖ The relative weakness of partner churches is a common theme, with several Companies linking this to pessimism about their own future.
- ❖ Community engagement is varied, with some suggesting that negative public perception of BB and/or the church impacts their ability to gain exposure and increase their voice in the local community. However, others report strong local coverage of their work.
- ❖ The use of social media to raise awareness, showcase the programme and support recruitment is varied across respondents. Many Companies indicate that they have no web or social media presence.
- ❖ Battalions tend to be more favourably viewed than Districts although experience and engagement levels vary.
- ❖ While OBM has had a positive impact on managing administration, few Companies utilise its full functionality. Several indicate that further training is required.
- ❖ Satisfaction levels and engagement with HQ support are high. Programme resources are particularly highly regarded and considered to have raised quality standards.
- ❖ No obviously significant regional variations emerged in analysis of the core data.
- ❖ Further detailed analysis could be helpful in highlighting common factors and learning points where Companies are experiencing growth and are positive about their future or where they are struggling.
- ❖ The output from the census analysis should provide helpful insights for the development of further specific actions aimed at advancing the organisation's strategic objectives.
- ❖ Consideration should be given to how best to communicate the key findings and learning points from the census back to Companies.

2 Background And Context

The Boys' Brigade is one of the largest Christian youth organisations in the UK and Republic of Ireland. It comprises around 1,200 BB Companies (groups) and serves up to 35,000 children and young people with the aim of 'advancing Christ's Kingdom.'

An independent strategic review of the organisation was carried out in 2019. This highlighted the need for urgent intervention to arrest a significant decline in membership levels. Of primary concern was the need to improve the quality and consistency of experience across Companies with a range of areas identified for attention including leadership, programme resources, training and support.

The five-year strategy that emerged from the strategic review placed a clear emphasis on quality with an expectation that this would lead to growth and an enhanced voice for the Brigade.

In May 2022, all BB Companies were asked to complete a detailed census to check progress against the five-year strategy and to provide a better understanding of the health of BB Companies across the country. The census was designed to identify what is working and what is not, and to help shape the support, resources and training needed by leaders. Companies were encouraged to complete the census as leadership teams but in around 65% of cases this was left to an individual company leader. Around 800 (two thirds) of Companies returned the census.

The questions in the census covered a range of categories including programme content, leadership, facilities, church and community engagement and communication. This report provides a summary of the findings across these subject areas and seeks to identify specific challenges and opportunities that emerge. Areas for encouragement in relation to progress against the five-year strategy are highlighted, together with issues that are of concern.

3 Programme

3.1 Resources

Encouragements & Challenges - Resources

- The programme resources produced by headquarters are highly regarded by a significant majority of Companies across the country. Maintaining momentum in this area will be critical in ensuring continued improvements in quality and consistency of delivery.
- A reasonably significant number of Companies (around 15%) report some difficulty in accessing the resources online. Further training might be required together with a review of online access to ensure this as straightforward as possible.

The termly programme resources produced by BB Headquarters are well used by Companies in each age group and the uptake is broadly similar across all regions. While still well used, uptake drops from around 90% for Anchors and Juniors to around 80% for Company groups and 70% for seniors. Around 90% of Companies report that the programme resources have a positive impact on the planning, delivery and quality of activities.

The Programme Hub on the BB website is the most popular channel for accessing resources, with around 70% of all Companies using the Hub. Printed programme packs are also popular, with almost 60% of respondents indicating that they make use of these. However, a somewhat less popular way to access resources is through OBM, with only 30% of respondents using this channel.

3.2 Competitions and Awards

Encouragements & Challenges – Competitions and Awards

- There is a very high level of engagement with the awards system. As with programme resources, this should make a significant contribution to the consistency of experience across Companies.
- Participation in Brigade competitions is much lower with half of all Companies not taking part at all. The census does not provide any follow-up information in relation to whether this is due to a lack of awareness, interest or other factors.
- Although headline participation in the awards system is high, this varies a lot by award. This might indicate an opportunity to promote certain awards or consider if they remain fit for purpose.

Only 50% of all Companies have participated in any competitions run by the Brigade in the last five years. Of these, around half have participated in one or more of the competitions provided.

On the other hand, participation in the awards system is extremely high with engagement running at around 90% across the age groups. However, some 100 or so Companies report that they don't offer awards to one or more of the age groups. Of these, 60 Companies don't offer awards at all. Around 20 Companies indicate that this is due to a lack of knowledge of the awards systems while a further 30 suggest that they recognise achievement in other ways. Other anecdotal reasons include a fear of only recognising some children, particularly in the younger age groups, and a feeling that the awards no longer act as a motivation.

The most common awards offered are Core Activity Awards. In the case of Anchors and Juniors these are offered by around 90% of Companies. Of the other awards, only Service Awards are offered by more than 75% of respondents with Nights Away and Recruitment Awards running at closer to 30%.

Around 20% of Companies don't offer the opportunity to work towards President's/Queen's Badges with around half of these saying that they have insufficient leaders or feel ill-equipped to provide the necessary support. Over 25% of Companies have young people working towards these awards annually with a further 50% or so indicating that they are offered when they have young people in the relevant age group.

Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award is somewhat lower with around 75% of respondents saying that this is not offered by their Company.

3.3 Planning, Residentials and Transport

Encouragements & Challenges – Planning, Residentials and Transport

- All leadership teams meet at least once per session for programme planning and most involve their children and young people at least to some extent.
- Leader availability and lack of experience significantly impact the ability of many Companies to offer residential opportunities. Consideration of options for addressing this and improving the consistency of offering in this area would be worthwhile.

All respondents reported meeting as leadership teams at least once per session to plan their programmes. 10% of leadership teams meet at least once per month with around 30% only meeting once per session. The remainder meet at least once per term. Over 80% of Companies report that they have at least one leader that works across more than one age group.

75% of Companies say that they involve children and young people in project planning although the census does not include additional information on the extent or nature of this input.

A little over half of Companies offer residential opportunities for Juniors with the number rising to over 70% for the older age groups. The most common type of residential experience offered is weekend indoor self-catering although church hall sleepovers and canvas camping are also offered by significant numbers of Companies.

The most cited barrier to residentials being offered was a lack of leader availability with almost 70% of respondents indicating this as a factor. Financial constraints were noted by around 25% of respondents while others suggested that a lack of numbers impacted on viability.

Almost 70% of Companies report that, at least to some extent, they rely on parents/carers to transport children and young people. Around 40% make use of self-drive minibuses while a further 20% use commercial coaches or minibuses. Around 10% report that they use public transport. Cost and availability of minibuses, together with the need for a D1 driving licence are all cited as significant barriers for Companies seeking to use minibus transport.

3.4 Meetings

Encouragements & Challenges – Meetings

- Meetings of all age groups appear to offer a healthy range of activities to children and young people.
- There is considerable disparity between the activities offered by different Companies and across age groups. While local variations are inevitable, and may indeed be desirable to some extent, the lack of consistency of offering might give some cause for concern.
- Given that the mission and values of the Brigade are founded on the Christian faith it is perhaps surprising that some Companies, albeit a relatively small number, report that their older age groups spend no time during their weekly meetings on devotions or Bible class.
- By way of contrast, a majority of Company and Seniors groups do spend substantive time on devotions or Bible class.

The main weekly meetings for all age groups are spread across weekdays with Friday being the most popular day with around 30% of groups meeting. In terms of meeting duration, Anchors meetings typically run for 1 hour, Juniors for 1¼ hours and older age groups meet for closer to 1½ hours.

There appear to be some wide disparities between the activities that make up normal weekly meetings and the length of time spent on these activities. For example, while most groups spend no more than 10 minutes on opening and closing activities, the time spent on games and sports varies widely both in terms of duration and across the age categories.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, games and sports feature most prominently with Anchors and Juniors where around 80% of groups spend between 15 and 30 minutes of their meeting on this activity. The figure falls to around 60% for Company and less than 50% for Seniors.

There is again a wide disparity when it comes to devotions or Bible class where over 50 Companies that operate a Seniors group and 60 that operate a Company group indicate that they spend no time at their weekly meeting on this. This could be, to an extent, a feature of how activities are categorised, since it is possible that some Companies consider devotions to be covered within their Opening/Closing activities rather than an additional discrete activity. More positively, the data indicates that between 50% and 60% of Company and Seniors group spend between 10 and 20 minutes on this activity.

Participation in core activities and badgework tends to decrease in the older age groups, although those that do participate tend to spend longer on this.

Very few Anchors groups spend any time on Drill and around 50% of Juniors also report that no time is spent on this. In older age groups, while up to 50% spend little or no time on Drill, those that do tend to spend proportionately more time with around 20% spending between 15 and 20 minutes.

Relatively few groups offer other activities beyond their normal weekly meeting although around 65% offer a trip or outing at least once per session. While around 45% of Companies report that they don't operate a summer programme, some 20% to 25% indicate that they operate a normal weekly programme. Almost 50% offer games at a park with around 25% in the older age groups offering opportunities to participate in adventure activities.

Around 60% of Companies have one or more age groups meeting together while 10% indicate that all their age groups meet at the same time. Around 75% of Companies operate largely separate Anchors and Juniors groups although in some cases certain activities are undertaken together. For the Company and Seniors groups, over 60% of respondents indicate that these groups meet together with a further 25% noting that, while they meet as separate groups, some activities are taken together. Although the census doesn't specifically explore the reasons for this, it seems likely, given the responses to other questions, that a key factor is the limited numbers of young people in these age groups together with a shortage of leaders.

Around 55% of young people in Company and Seniors groups wear shirt and tie to meetings as opposed to wearing polo shirt and sweatshirt. .

4 Premises

Encouragements & Challenges – Premises

- The facilities available to most Companies appear to be very suitable for the programme of activities. In only a few cases would finance appear to be an issue.

Most Companies meet in church premises with almost 90% indicating that the meeting space is either good or excellent. Only around 10% consider their premises to be limiting in terms of the programme that can be offered. A similar percentage report that they have no access to a suitable outdoor space for activities.

Around 50% of companies do not incur any cost for the use of their meeting space, 40% say that they make a donation and a further 10% pay a set fee. Of those who make a donation or pay fees, only a very small number pay £1,000 or more.

5 Development

5.1 Reach & Health

Encouragements & Challenges – Reach & Health

- Significant numbers of Anchors and Juniors have seen growth in their membership numbers leading to optimism for the future. In general, more Companies believe that they will be stronger in five years than those who think they will be weaker or will have closed.
- Where Companies are optimistic, in addition to increased membership, this is tied to improved programme quality and enhanced leadership which suggest some traction for the Brigade's strategic objectives.
- Many Companies, particularly in the older age groups, continue to experience declining membership, with around one third considering themselves to be struggling or at risk of closure. In addition to concerns over membership, many of these Companies highlight leadership deficiencies.
- Many respondents indicate that they would welcome additional support in relation to recruitment of members and leaders and in relation to programme planning. Further support in use of OBM would also be welcomed.

At all age groups, most Companies operate with 15 or fewer attendees. Only in the case of Anchors do more than 20% of Companies have numbers greater than this. Fewer than 15% of Juniors groups have more than 15 attendees.

The figures are even more stark in the older age groups with 65% of Companies with Seniors groups having 5 or fewer young people attending. A further 25% have 10 or fewer. In the case of Company groups, 40% have 5 or fewer attending with 30% having 10 or fewer.

Around one third of Companies with Anchors and Juniors report decline over the past three years. The figure rises to over 40% for both Company and Seniors. From comparison of the number of respondents to related questions, it appears that a reasonably significant number of Seniors groups might have closed over the past three years.

Somewhat more encouraging is that over 30% of Anchors and over 20% of Juniors report growth in their membership over the past three years and around 30% in each case say that they are operating at or close to capacity.

The top three areas for which Companies indicate they would welcome additional support are recruitment of children and young people (cited by around 60% of respondents), recruitment of leaders (around 55%) and programme planning (around 40%). Significant numbers would also welcome support in raising their profile which would presumably contribute towards the top two needs. Also featuring are leader development, succession planning and OBM support.

Around one third of Companies believe that they are struggling or at risk, with only 10% considering themselves to be in strong health. However, around 55% report that they are in a stable position.

Almost 30% of respondents believe that their Company will be stronger in five years while around 20% think that they will be weaker or will have closed.

Of those struggling, or considering themselves to be at risk, the single biggest reason for this outlook is a declining membership, with 65% citing this as a reason. Around 40% also relate their pessimism to a lack of leadership. Similar factors are at play for those who believe that their five-year outlook is negative although in that case, struggling local churches also feature heavily with over 20% noting this as a factor.

Companies that believe they will be in a stronger position in five years cite a spread of reasons, the most common of which is an increase in membership. Also featuring heavily are improvements in programme quality and leader recruitment and commitment.

5.2 Recruitment

Encouragements & Challenges – Recruitment

- Word of mouth is the most successful means of recruiting new members. This would seem to suggest that members enjoy the content and quality of the activities on offer and are keen to share this with others.
- An absence of relationship with local schools is noted by many Companies. If such relationships could be fostered, this might represent a productive recruitment channel for new members.
- It is of some concern that a relatively large number of Companies have not recruited any new leaders in the past five years. This will make it very difficult to undertake any meaningful succession planning in these Companies.

Word of mouth is by far the most significant factor in recruiting new members. Nothing else comes close to the 85% of Companies that highlight this as their most successful method. Next on the list are social media postings and leaflets/posters which were cited by just over 30% of respondents.

Almost half of Companies report that they have no contact with local schools and only 15% indicate any regular contact with school personnel. However, around 30% say that their local school distributes leaflets on their behalf.

The top three sources of recruitment for new volunteer leaders are young people moving into leadership (around 45%), the local church and parents/carers (both around 35%). Almost 15% of Companies say that they have not recruited any new leaders in the past five years.

6 Finance

Encouragements & Challenges – Finance

- Lack of finance does not appear to be a major cause for concern for most Companies. For those who consider themselves to be struggling financially it is perhaps a symptom rather than a cause of decline.

Membership fees average at around £55 to £60 per annum across age groups with the vast majority coming in at under £100. There are a few outliers who report charges in excess of this.

Almost 60% of Companies offer financial assistance for purchase of uniforms with around 45% also offering support for residentials, trips and membership fees.

Almost 75% of Companies receive some money from grants or fundraising activities with only around 10% considering themselves to be struggling financially. Most see themselves being in a similar financial position in five years.

7 Church Partnership

Encouragements & Challenges – Church Partnership

- Most companies benefit at least to some extent from the input of a Chaplain or other member of church staff. Children, young people and leaders also get involved in Sunday services as well as supporting other church activities. Further integration could be mutually beneficial for both churches and Companies.
- With many children and young people appearing to have no other connection with the local church, this represents an opportunity to introduce them to the Christian faith through the work of BB.
- Many partner churches appear to be weak and struggling for survival. This could impact on the viability of BB Companies and compromise access to premises.

Around 60% of partner churches have attendances of 60 or fewer on Sunday mornings. Only around 20% have attendances of more than 100 with a similar percentage having attendances of less than 20.

Almost 90% of partner churches have the benefit of at least a part-time or shared minister with around 20% having at least a part-time children's/youth worker. Most Companies have Chaplains appointed by their local church.

Other than Sunday youth activities the most common children's youth work provision by local churches is the Girls' Brigade which is offered by around 40%.

In most Companies at least a few leaders regularly attend the church although in only around one third do the majority attend regularly. Around 15% of respondents say that all leaders are members of the church, with a further 30% saying that the majority are members. In a small number of cases, no leaders are members of the church.

It should be noted that some of the later comments in the census suggested that while leaders might not attend the partner church, some are active members of other churches.

Almost 25% of Companies report that none of their children or young people regularly attend the church and in only a very few cases do the majority attend regularly. While this might appear negative, it could be turned on its head and viewed positively that children with no other church connection are being introduced to the Christian faith.

In almost 90% of Companies the Chaplain or other member of church leadership gets involved BB activities at least once a year. However, in only around 15% of cases is the involvement on a weekly basis. The most significant involvement of Chaplains is at annual awards/displays although in around 40% of cases they also get involved in leading devotions and Bible studies.

Church parades as part of Sunday services are held at least once a year by over 90% of Companies with 30% having parades once a term and around 10% having them once a month.

In almost 85% of cases, children, young people and leaders play some part in Sunday services with 70% of Companies also getting involved in other church activities such as fundraising (around 50% of Companies) and community outreach (around 25%).

Around 50% of respondents consider their church to be in stable health with a further 15% suggesting that their church is strong. However, almost 30% consider their church to be struggling and 5% believe that its future is at risk. A very similar pattern is seen in attitudes towards the future health of churches in five years.

The single biggest factor driving the belief that churches are struggling and at risk of further weakening or closure is an observed decline in membership/attendance.

8 Engagement

8.1 Community

Encouragements & Challenges – Community Engagement

- Opportunities exist for Companies to get involved in local community projects and to gain greater exposure in local media.
- Many Companies believe that negative public perception of BB or the church is a barrier to enhanced visibility. Such perceptions can be countered with evidence of the quality of experience enjoyed by children and young people.

Fewer than half of Companies get any local media coverage relating to their work. Where coverage is received it is most commonly from local newspapers or community websites or social media pages.

Only 25% of Companies indicate that they work in partnership with other local community groups or projects. However, 50% get involved in fundraising for other organisations or projects, locally, nationally or globally.

Over 80% of Companies believe that there is at least some awareness within their local community although fewer than 10% consider themselves to be well known. Almost half think that the biggest barrier to being more visible in the community is that they are church based. A significant number (around 45%) also think that public perception of BB (presumably negative) is also a significant challenge. By way of contrast, around 20% believe that there is no barrier to enhanced visibility.

8.2 Communication

Encouragements & Challenges – Communication

- Some Companies make effective use of social media to raise awareness, showcase their programme and support recruitment.
- Work is needed to address the fact that many Companies have no web or social media presence.

Email is the most prevalent means of communication with parents/carers (used by over 70% of Companies) with printed letters also featuring prominently. Social media/text messaging is used by around 60% of Companies.

Facebook is the most heavily used social media platform with 50% indicating that they use this channel. WhatsApp messaging is used by around 40% of Companies. Around 15% of Companies indicate that they don't make any use of social media.

Around 20% of Companies have their own website with a further 40% either using Facebook or having a page on a church/Battalion/District website rather than their own website. Almost 40% have no website presence at all.

9 Battalion And District

9.1 Battalion

Encouragements & Challenges – Battalion

- Battalions seem to be widely valued by Companies and engagement with activities and services is relatively high.
- Provision for older age groups and for young leaders seems disappointing. Further input in this area could provide opportunities for collaboration where individual Company groups are small. Provision of an effective Young Leaders Network might provide a support structure that could help to underpin efforts to recruit new leaders.

There appears to be a relatively high level of engagement between Companies and Battalions particularly in relation to events and competitions (up to 70% of Companies participating), training for young people and leaders (around 65%) and support for President's and Queen's Badge (around 65%).

Only 50% of Battalions appear to offer activities for Seniors and where these are offered, participation sits at around 60%. Similar figures apply to residential opportunities at Battalion level.

Only 10% of Companies report participation in a Young Leaders Network with around 70% saying that this is not offered.

The role of Battalions is considered to be significant by most Companies with around 80% saying that Battalion activities are an important addition to their programme and almost 60% saying that the support provided is key to their success. On the other hand, around 40% of Companies believe that the Battalion could do more to support.

Over 90% of Companies believe that involvement with the Battalion helps young people feel more connected to the wider BB movement.

Overall, over 90% of Companies report that they are at least satisfied with their experience of Battalion support, with over 20% considering it to be excellent.

9.2 District

Encouragements & Challenges – District

- In general, Districts appear to be less highly regarded than Battalions with fewer services and lower participation levels. Attitudes suggest that this is in danger of being regarded by many as an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy.

Fewer services are provided by Districts as compared to Battalions and participation levels are also lower when these are offered. The highest level of engagement is in relation to training for young people and leaders with between 40% and 45% of Companies reporting that they participate. Around 40% of respondents also benefit from support offered in relation to President's and Queen's Badges.

Only around 40% of respondents expressed the view that District activities were an important addition to their programme and fewer than 25% consider District support to be a key factor in their success.

Almost 60% reported that they do not generally interact with their District although they recognise that participation in District activities could help young people feel more connected to the wider BB movement.

Overall, around 60% of respondents still feel at least satisfied with their District although only around 5% consider their experience to be excellent.

10 HQ Services And Support

10.1 OBM

Encouragements & Challenges – OBM

- OBM is generally regarded as having had a positive impact on managing administration requirements, with some of the core functions being heavily used.
- Usage of OBM varies across Companies with only around 25% of Companies using wider functionality such as badge record keeping, managing events, parent portal, online payments, etc.

Almost all respondents indicate that they use OBM for their statistical return with most also using it to record personal details and for training records. Around 40% use OBM for searching programme activities and around 25% for programme planning. 40% also use it for badge/awards records and for an attendance register. Around 20% use the parent portal and fewer than 10% use it for receiving payments.

Around 30% of Companies say that leaders access OBM at least once a week while 20% say that they only access it for the purpose of the statistical return.

Around 60% say that OBM helps to streamline their administration although only around one third feel that it takes all the hassle out of administration on meeting nights, thereby allowing more time with members.

While around 65% believe that OBM is easy to access on any device, around 50% feel that they need more support to be able to use it. Overall, around 35% seem fairly positive about their OBM experience with around 25% being broadly negative.

10.2 General

Encouragements & Challenges – HQ General

- There is very good awareness of most of the services provided by HQ and high levels of engagement with most of these services. Programme materials are particularly highly regarded and widely considered to have raised quality standards.
- Satisfaction levels with HQ support is generally high with relatively few expressing dissatisfaction.
- Some general comments at the end of the census express concern about growing administrative and compliance demands being placed on Companies.

In general, there appears to be a high level of awareness of the majority of HQ services. Close to 90% of Companies indicate that they use the Programme Hub while around 50% to 60% use other resources and training courses.

Over 60% of Companies say that they make use of the HQ Support Team, with similar numbers accessing GDPR guidance. There has also been fairly strong uptake of the

Company Health Check, branding resources, the leaders Facebook group and leader webinars (all around 40%).

Around 55% of respondents indicate a very positive experience (a score of at least 4 out of 5) of HQ services with less than 10% appearing dissatisfied.

Almost 50% of respondents appear positive about their experience with completing the census with a further 40% being fairly neutral. Almost 70% expressed the view that the census has been at least somewhat useful in helping to consider where they are as a Company. Almost 30% have created actions or targets as a result.