

# Starting a Scout Band



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## Introduction

This edition of the factsheet replaces that coded BAN-1-86. It provides assistance to Leaders and Commissioners involved with the setting up of a Scout or a Scout and Guide Band in a Group, District or County/Area. Further editions may be produced in the light of feedback from this edition. The issue of replacement factsheets will be notified in SCOUTING Magazine, Talking Points and the Activities Newsletter.

## General

The first question to ask yourself is if you really want one and, before answering in the affirmative, find out if everyone in the Group or District is of the same opinion. Some people are of the opinion that a Scout Band is not 'real' Scouting. This, of course, is nonsense if the balance is kept between Scouting and the band. The band must take its proper place in the scale of things and not become a case of the tail wagging the dog. This is a very real danger but, if approached in the right way, Scout Bands can enhance activities and stimulate young people to join and participate in the other aspects and activities of the Movement.

Correctly organised, a Group can benefit immensely from having a band. Membership will, almost certainly, increase. Personal smartness will improve and publicity value will bring Scouting to the public eye. An added advantage is that members tend to stay with the Group longer, thus the potential to recruit Leaders is greatly enhanced.

## Can You Afford It?

Instruments are very expensive. Practice facilities have to be hired. Insurance is required. Maintenance costs are expensive and tutors may need to be paid. All features which must be

considered before you become too enthusiastic and land yourself or your Group fund raisers with an ongoing liability which has to run alongside your normal fund raising requirements for the Group to function as a conventional Scout Group with conventional Scouting activities.

## Is Everyone Enthusiastic and Co-operative?

If they aren't - you're doomed from the start. All bands require recruits and if the choice is 'the band or the Scouts ...', in respect of activities, you have a conflict of loyalties which is detrimental to both the band and the Group. The choice should always be 'the Scouts' but with good Leader co-operation any such conflicts should be avoided. The relationship you will form between the Bandmaster and the Leader of the Section ensures that the Leader will be involved with the band without realising it, and so will have more of an interest in remaining aware of developments. This involvement and consultation adds to the factor of goodwill. A regular information sheet regarding the band keeps everyone informed and is a very useful asset to the life of a Scout Band. It should be sent to all band members, Leaders of the Group or District and parents.

## What Else Do You Need?

First of all a Bandmaster is required. The Specialist Adviser for Scout Bands or the County/Area Band Adviser cannot conjure up a ready-made Bandmaster so it is up to you to do the 'conjuring'.

Experience shows that, in most cases, the best Bandmasters come from within. No matter how well qualified an outsider may be there needs to be an affinity with the Aims and Objectives of the Movement and commitment to its principles. Therefore it is better to get the services of

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someone within your immediate Organisation right from the start.

Technical and administrative support can be obtained from outside sources, and support will be required in many ways - instructing on drill as well as music, equipment purchase, care and repair, a treasurer, booking secretary, supporters' functions, transport and so on.

Once you have found your Bandmaster there follows the problem of "status". Should a Bandmaster be a warranted appointment? There is no hard and fast rule that can be applied. In all cases it is imperative that the inquiry procedure laid down in the Policy, Organisation and Rules of The Scout Association is carried out.

A Bandmaster who wishes to appear with the band in uniform must meet the requirements of The Association as defined by the Policy, Organisation and Rules relating to the Acquisition of Membership. Thus they can be a Scouter or an adult. Acceptance of a Leader Appointment has formal training obligations which are not required for an adult appointed as a Skills Instructor. The choice is that of the Bandmaster and the Group Scout Leader or appropriate Commissioner.

At the same time as the Bandmaster is recruited, it is essential that a support committee is formed. This committee which should be a properly constituted sub-committee of the sponsoring Group, District or County/Area does not run the band, that is the responsibility of the Group Scout Leader or appropriate Commissioner.

The committee should have its terms of reference clearly defined from the outset. The committee does not have any responsibility for the leadership of the band or the activities of the young people involved in the band. The terms of reference should be concerned solely with the fund raising and accounting, the ownership of instruments and any other equipment and any social events connected with the band. It is essential that the instruments, equipment and funds are clearly understood to be the property of the sponsoring Scout or Scout and Guide Group, District or County/Area.

### **Minimum Requirements**

The basic requirements for starting a band are as follows:-

1. Enough young people to maintain a minimum number of performers, which is 12.
2. Enough finance to supply them with instruments and maybe even uniform.
3. Somewhere suitable for them to be taught and to practise.
4. Someone with enough authority and knowledge to make it interesting.
5. Enough goodwill from the Scout Leaders to maintain adequate recruitment.

The Rules of The Scout Association, as shown in Policy, Organisation & Rules, lay down that the minimum number in any Scout Band will be 12. Any numbers less than this would not be a viable concern and certainly would not be allowed to play in public.

Finance would be a constant source of worry, but there are a number of avenues which can be explored to obtain help in cash or kind. In certain areas educational grants are available and certainly instruments can be purchased through educational schemes which make them cheaper than on the open market. The price of instruments should never be underestimated and many leading suppliers and retail outlets will give you details on request. Always remember to allow sufficient finance to cover letting fees for practice facilities which you may have to hire.

The practice hall should ideally be situated well away from residential areas, thus reducing any noise nuisance to local residents. The Law permits one to play indoors until 9pm without causing a breach of the peace, but if you are practising out of doors this can be more difficult during the evenings. Therefore, if you are close to domestic houses you should always inform the neighbours of your intentions. You will create a lot of goodwill if they know when you are going to play, the time you are starting, and the time you are stopping. These times should be adhered to rigidly and furthermore your members should know that you will not allow instruments to be played in the streets to and from their homes.

Many successful Scout Bandmasters were not trained as musicians as such when they started. With an enthusiasm and an inventive personality they can overcome any lack of knowledge. Obviously as the band progresses it will depend

on an ever increasing awareness of musical taste. A band's ability is never static. It is inevitable you will get members leaving through lack of interest, other interests developing, or being over age. It is therefore vital that when a band is being formed there is enough recruit potential to keep replenishing the numbers.

If you are recruiting from the Cub Scout Section you must remember the age and ability of Cub Scouts at this stage of their development. The best time is to start recruiting when Cub Scouts are working towards their transfer to the Scout Section, say from 10 years or so onwards. Cub Scouts younger than this may have difficulty in adjusting to the required discipline, both personal and enforced, which is necessary if they are to become good musicians and members of a Scout Marching Band. Bandmasters should maintain a regular exchange of information with the Leaders of the Group or District to ensure their continued goodwill and encouragement for the band activities.

### **New recruits**

It is important to establish early in the life of the band a standard method of inducting and training new members. It is ideal if a number of recruits can be taken into the band at one time rather than dealing with an odd one now and again. If you announce that on a certain date new members will be accepted into the band, you will find life easier.

This date can re-occur every three months or so, enabling you to anticipate a batch of new recruits for initial training. At the same time ask to meet at least one of their parents on the first night and you will get some idea which of the recruits has the support of their families. Not all parents will bother to turn up but at least you will have some idea of those who are likely to persevere, as it normally comes down to parental backup in the end.

Meet the parents enthusiastically and, if available, give them details of the band's rules and a Parents' Consent Form. At the same time the Section Leader should be informed that the young person is now a band member.

It is very useful to add a rider to the form stating that if a recruit defaults in their Scout work they will be suspended until the situation improves or the recruit is dismissed. You cannot wait for young people to make up their minds, so a period

may have to be decided amongst the Leaders, normally 3 to 4 weeks will allow sufficient time.

When young people join a band for the first time they may not be sure of what instrument they wish to play (although one had the feeling that everyone wants to be a drummer). You must get them interested by letting them have a go on a range of instruments, not for too long a period, but just enough to whet the appetite.

### **Attendance**

All members attending practice and engagements should be entered on the Attendance Register and Subscriptions Book. Likewise a progress chart should be made out which can be filled in systematically as the members achieve success in each section of their training. Hopefully this will culminate in the Musician Badge which you can arrange to be presented at the Annual Band Inspection. Each Bandmaster or Instructor should have access to these progress charts so that progressive marks in entering competitions can be recorded and pooled by all Leaders when necessary to decide achievement awards, and so on.

### **The Drum Major**

A good Drum Major is a great asset to a band, reflecting the Bandmaster's wishes in the best possible way. No matter how young, the Drum Major should constantly be at the Bandmaster's side listening to arrangements, learning how the band is required to perform, and generally become a mirror to the Bandmaster's wishes.

Ultimately, when undertaking an engagement, the Bandmaster may not be in front and it will be the Drum Major who has to take the responsibility. It is the Drum Major's function to control the band on the road, anticipating hazards and taking appropriate action. Also the Drum Major needs to learn how to present the band in its most complementary way and should be an outstanding example of turnout and deportment for others to emulate.

The ideal person for this position is someone with the demeanour and ability of a good Patrol Leader, who can lead with a good example and has abilities, apart from turnout and deportment, which include a clear voice, cool head, foresight and the ability to think on the spot.

Some time spent on each instrument should be a good grounding, as the Drum Major will then know the inherent problems in each situation and thus will be able to allow for them, i.e. trumpet cannot respond to urgent signals when reading from music. Signals have to be indicated in good time to allow everyone's thinking process to take place. No band can burst into sound or stop it at a second's notice. Good mace control and the ability to communicate with it, and a clear voice are essentials.

### **Quartermaster**

This is an essential appointment in any band and can be undertaken by a senior member, or better still an interested parent, especially if they have an interest in do-it-yourself jobs like carpentry and textile repairs, etc.

The Quartermaster will need a system of recording the composition of each set of equipment as issued. i.e. Trumpet No. 1 box contains: Trumpet; mouthpiece; carrying cord; pair of gloves. Condition: New, one small scratch or dent removed on 1st November. Issued to: Member A. Insurance value: £50. As each instrument is returned, damage will have to be made good and charged for if it can be attributed to negligence.

The Quartermaster is also the ideal person to issue additional equipment and collect it back when the band goes out on engagements; that is why it is ideal to have a keen parent who supports the band to undertake this extra responsibility. A keen Quartermaster will see that the members care for their instruments properly and will help them by instructing on the best way of cleaning their equipment.

In dealing with repairs, simple paint jobs are usually well within the scope of a good Quartermaster, and they are the ideal person to warn the Bandmaster when things are wearing out or need sprucing up a bit. Simple dents can be removed with a stroking stick shaped for the instrument, and sometimes small soldering jobs can save a lot of money in repairs. A good Quartermaster will learn how to do this and will be worth their weight in gold.

With the arrival on the public scene the Quartermaster's job will necessarily expand. It is the Quartermaster's job to ensure that the equipment is left in good working order. The

Quartermaster will need a supply of spares for those emergencies that occur at the inopportune moments. At a function the Quartermaster can often provide another pair of hands to assist with props, stage shows, helping open gates, etc. Most importantly they are a regular assistant who will get to know the parents' skills so that when a job needs doing that they cannot deal with, they can ask the appropriate person.

### **Publicity**

A good, experienced Public Relations Officer is the ideal, but anyone with patience and imagination can do this job and it may well be that one of the parents who is not otherwise committed might like to take on this task. Fund raising is a separate responsibility but the Public Relations Officer should ensure that any advertising, pennants, announcements or car badges, are uniform in the public approach, and not only raise money but also publicise the band and its existence.

Your Public Relations Officer has an important job, and should have built up a relationship with the local media. The expertise of the Public Relations Officer gets you known and finds the band engagements.

Good publicity starts in the way you present yourself to the public. This may not be when they first see you, but when they correspond with you. Therefore the band needs to have paper with good letter-headings, preferably with an instantly recognisable symbol which can therefore be identified particularly with your Scout Band. Visiting cards are useful as they can be handed to people you meet on engagements or who just want general information.

Your own letter-heads or logo on your rule books, record cards, bulletins, etc, all help to promote an efficient 'image'. The best sort of publicity, however, is when the general public see you for themselves. Informally, when the band is travelling or at an engagement, if the general public sees the members turned out in a uniform sweatshirt with the name of the band or even your logo upon it, it will impress them even before the band plays.

When the band is on parade there are additional ways in which you can identify yourselves by carrying a tasteful emblem and/or logo with the name of the band carefully and legibly displayed.

Instrument boxes can also publicise your activities as again it can carry your band name or logo. If these are kept in a good condition and well printed they will also help to create an air of efficiency.

### **Presentation and Showmanship**

When your band has been trained and passed by your County/Area Band Adviser to play in public it will be necessary to consider the band's presentation and showmanship. This will always reflect much preparation and forethought. In your training of the new band it will be necessary to consider that the band will ultimately play in public and this should be reflected in the training.

It is vital to know, first of all, exactly in what environment you will be asked to perform and to examine it in view of the proposed performance. To only have one routine on a set size of arena is not good from any band's point of view.

The band should always be able to adapt to the best conditions and requirements of those booking the performance. Always look at the venue and even if it is only a bit of waste ground, there will always be a right and wrong way to perform. Try and see which is the best visual background, also see if the sound of the band will reflect off anything, check whether the sun is in the eyes of the audience, try never to play up a slope. Look at your standard display and see if it will fit and if it does not, how it can be modified.

Always walk the ground beforehand with the Drum Major to establish the details and to be sure of which direction to approach the arena to enter and exit. Try to find some point of reference to line up to. If it is possible before the audience arrives, walk through it with the band so they also know the details and are confident of what is going to happen. Rehearse where you are assembling and how you will get to the start.

All this adds to the impression the public will form of you before you actually start to perform. Once near the arena or actually in it impress upon the members to stand still like statues, as this will increase your presence and appeal to onlookers. One member fidgeting can spoil the whole effect.

Having seen the arena and considered the implications already mentioned, consider how you will achieve the right effect. If there are guests you would wish to impress, you would not be

expected to play with your backs to them, but do not be misled into thinking you should play to them alone. It is possible that the majority of the audience will be on one side and the guest enclosure on the opposite side of the field or whatever arena is being used.

A sideways display may be the best in the circumstances, in other words do not always do the obvious. An innovative approach adds surprise and interest to your presentation. Never do anything different without making sure the band fully understands and has rehearsed it.

Even simple things that are changed without rehearsal are usually spoilt by someone who does things the old way without thinking. This may sound pedantic, but some really good ideas have suffered by being done without rehearsal beforehand, so make sure everyone understands what is required. This applies to the simplest of things, how a member holds a trumpet or fixes an accessory to an instrument. This point cannot be stressed too strongly.

An impressive entrance and opening position should always be sought. Do not straggle into position, always start on time and do not keep the audience waiting. You will soon find you will get a good reputation for promptness. Make sure of the space available, but do not allow yourselves to be stretched by an over large arena. It is better to play to one end than try to fill it by over spacing and consequent loss of effect. When appearing on stage, which is often thought very small for bandwork, use every inch, including the corners.

Feature the strengths of the band and try to camouflage the weaknesses. For example if the brass section soon tires, save it for the big efforts and feature the tuned percussion and drum sections more. Always make a point of indicating to the audience when you expect them to applaud - there is nothing more disconcerting than when band stops playing and then pauses with uncertainty. The audience often feels more uncomfortable than the performers on these occasions because they do not know whether to applaud or not. A flourish in the music, a smart salute or bowed heads can have the desired effect. To encourage this applause stand perfectly still in the final position. At the first sign of movement the applause will start to die.

Timing is an essential ingredient in show business and it is a policy never to give your audience enough, always leave them wanting more. Keep

performances short! Better two, seven minutes spots than one of fifteen minutes. If you have to perform for longer than ten minutes try and think of a change of style, pace or mood as this will help, maybe a simple comic touch done with style will break the seriousness of the band music. Dignity is a word which should be associated with Scout Band performances, even with comedy items. If you get the audience to laugh with you they will never laugh at you.

Never reveal all your assets at the start of a performance. Building up to a climax is better than hitting them with everything at the start. It also helps your audience to acclimatise to the noise factor. Sometimes just a simple soft drum tap can be built into a really vital piece of music by adding instruments two or three at a time. Experience has shown that two or three at a time is a better idea than solo work, as individual performances can be nerve racking for performers and audience alike, and playing in small groups can give each member confidence. They also provide insurance against mistakes, players often play far more confidently when they are relaxed and consequently the audience gets more enjoyment.

Movements must be kept simple and clean, especially on a stage. Positive moves well done are much better than difficult ones executed sloppily. The moves, turns, halts, etc. should fall comfortably into the rhythm of the music rather than letting the rigid idea of a display govern the music. It is often good policy to have two displays, one for roomy areas, the other for indoor use or on stage. Smaller displays can be used with flatter movements for use on stage or small arenas.

For example instead of performing in circles, try ovals; instead of a deep figure of eight, do the same movement sideways. A set piece will always go a long way as a finale. Visual interest can be added to a set piece by movement of light or the addition of extra performers (in a show the dancers), outdoors this can be Drum Majors, cymbals and tenor drums or even a drum majorette group.

Be positive and try to finish with a flourish, give value. Most of all give value in effort. Never undersell your audience. Show how much you respect them by your attention to what you are doing and more importantly by your immaculate personal turnout (no matter how small the event may be). Never ever turn the band out without

making sure every member is clean and smart. Add dimension and interest as you go along.

If the Band looks as if they are enjoying the experience they probably will be!!

### **Publication Cross Reference**

Current Editions of:  
Policy, Organisation & Rules of The Scout Association.

Information Centre factsheet  
County/Area Band Adviser - FS120211 July 2008  
Guidelines for Scout Bands - FS120213 –July 2008

The Guide Association  
Guide Bands and Guide Membership of Scout and Guide Bands - December 1993.