

Jobwatch: head of service

The thought of holding responsibility for an entire county's music services may seem incredibly daunting, but it's a role that can provide great satisfaction, as **Emma Whale** discovers

Despite the manifesto, and the notable rejuvenation in levels of public support for music as a curricular and extra-curricular subject, 2004 was still an *annus horribilis* for many music services. Reports proliferated of extortionate fee rises, publicised scraps between services and schools, peripatetics losing their jobs and children losing their instruments. Press coverage was, in the main, negative, and the usual issues of underfunding and staffing difficulties largely overshadowed the sterling work of many services. In that climate, you'd have to wonder – who in their right mind would want the overarching responsibility for so many schools, so many teachers, so many students and their parents?

The first thing to note about the job of head of music service is that it can entail very different responsibilities depending on the county and its situation. For example, whereas for many music service heads a significant part of the role will be managing a tranche of peripatetics, for somewhere like Devon – which divested itself of its 120 instrumental teachers last year – the average day is very different. 'We took the decision last year that we would no longer underpin individual instrumental tuition across the county,' explains head of service Ken Parr. 'We still support ensembles, music centres and county groups, but we regard ourselves now as an enabling and supporting organisation – we help schools to make the very best they can of musical opportunities.' The decision, he states, was partly financial, partly to do with the difficulties involved in managing a large group of teachers over a very large county, but mostly to do with realigning the service to the manifesto.

Parr's time is now largely spent working on a series of projects, many of which involve bringing in outside professionals to run workshops for schools. 'We invited the London Community Gospel Choir to come to Devon for three days, for example, and they did workshops and public

performances. And that was inspirational, according to the feedback we had: one teacher said to me that they felt they'd run a little dry through their classroom work, and through this project they'd got a full tank.' Parr reels off a truly impressive list of projects including an exploration of Caribbean music and links to the south west, and last year's *pièce de résistance*, the Devon Schools Mix, which brought around 5,000 participants together for a music festival of staggering proportions.

'Most of this is about Wider Opportunities in schools,' explains Parr. 'Sometimes it's about leading projects in schools, because the school might want to move forward with music but don't have people with the particular skills they need, so we help them with that. But in a sustainable way – this is not about us doing something for them, or to them – the school can run with it and develop it themselves. So my job is to manage these sorts of experiences for the county. And I also have to connect with arts organisations, district councils, regional theatres and so on, to make sure that we take maximum advantage of what they can offer.'

Northamptonshire Music Service is also expanding its Wider Opportunities work, according to head of service Peter Dunkley, and is working on a rock/pop/ICT project that he hopes to extend. At county level the service is launching a new world-music group, a harp ensemble and an electric guitar ensemble; there's an orchestral project in the pipeline; and Dunkley has to deal with a request for 150 additional hours of teaching time from September. 'A head of music service has to be good at juggling, and it's a rare day when you can 100 per cent solve anything as you're always having to look ahead – you have to accept that you're never going to have everything planned and you must be able to think on your feet, though it's great when a plan comes together,' he explains.

'These days, my job consists of answering reams of emails, fire-fighting any problems – we deliver some 2,300 hours of teaching every week in schools alone, so there can be quite a few staff problems – then there's all the out-of-school activity to deal with as well. I have to schedule time to visit staff to appraise and support them, make sure the budget is on track, that the marketing is working well, that contracts are in place and so on. Also planning for my own teaching and conducting – I like to keep some hands-on activity with young people. In fact, I think it's essential to stay sane.'



Five thousand children at Devon Schools Mix Big Sing

Heads of music services are not, generally, managerial figures brought in to balance budgets with no sense of what it's like on the ground. Parr, who has had the headship for 14 years, was originally a woodwind instrumental teacher who moved up to head of woodwind for the county. 'I was trained as a performer, then as a teacher, and I moved into this particular area of the world to play initially. I then became involved with the education department, and I very much wanted to be able to pass on skills that I'd learnt and also my passion for music in all its forms, and things rather grew from there. I've had a broad experience throughout the service, and held a number of different responsibilities.'



Head of Devon Music Service
Ken Parr leads a saxophone workshop

Dunkley also started out in a playing capacity, as a clarinetist touring with D'Oyly Carte. 'Looking for a more settled lifestyle, I wrote to a large number of LEAs in the east London area, and spent several happy years as a freelance teacher, performer and conductor. I loved teaching, and decided to take further qualifications, passing my Cert Ed in 1973.' After approximately ten years of teaching, first in London and then in Swindon, he came to the Northants service 'after a last-minute panic application having seen the advert in the TES' as the deputy local music adviser. 'The music advisor then retired in 1992, at a time of a huge change in funding, and I was the right person at the right time in the right place with the requisite business acumen to become the head of the newly formed Music Service Business Unit, as we were then.'

Maureen Hanke became head of Norfolk Music Service in 2001. 'I was self-employed as a teacher trainer and consultant, and Norfolk approached me concerning their plans to develop the music service. They were using the newly released standards funds to support and reinvigorate the service. As the work unfolded, I remember thinking, "This would be a really great job – I fancy this myself!" And so I applied when the headship was advertised.' Prior to that, Hanke had taught in inner London as head of department in a Tower Hamlets school, worked for a music advisory service in north London, and for Trinity College of Music as director of continuing education and music education. She argues that her experiences gave her 'an inner absolute drive to make music happen for everyone in a way that

is meaningful for them' that has proven invaluable in her role as head of music service.

In terms of the skills and qualities any aspiring head of service must possess, Hanke states that 'communication, analysis, negotiation, leadership, empathy, teaching skills, management skills, ICT, photocopying, arranging, rehearsing, problem solving' are all essential. 'It's about juggling priorities, having patience and sympathy for people, and a clear vision of what you want and can do,' Dunkley adds. 'Also, these days, political (small p) and entrepreneurial skills, a real love of what you're doing, making sure you have expert advice to hand and ensuring that you take it, giving others credit where credit is deserved, and a willingness to work all the hours that are available.'

And what are the most intractable challenges? 'A challenging part of the job as far as Devon is concerned is that it is a very big county,' says Parr. 'There are difficulties in terms of communication; you can't always get to see people face to face. Colleagues that work in smaller authorities can meet on a very regular basis, but we can't to the same extent. And financial constraints are certainly a factor. When we were trying to provide tuition for schools, there was always the worry that people might not buy back enough tuition, or there'd not be enough teachers and you'd have to find staff really quickly – it was a real balancing act.'

For Dunkley, the hardest aspect is often dealing with people, 'especially where you need to point out some home truths. You have to be totally understanding and supportive, but the bottom line has to be the progress of the students. Kids only get one chance at education, as someone once said. And then there's the complexities of employment law generally, finding new staff and getting the budget right in commercial terms, but working within the confines of a county council.'

'The most challenging aspect is trying to touch the hearts and minds of all staff, to get them actively engaged in taking the service forward,' affirms Hanke. 'To get them enthusiastic about broadening the music service agenda, and to want to make sure that the children are always put first.' She is keen to point out, nevertheless, that she 'loves every aspect of the job'. Dunkley is equally enthusiastic: 'The most enjoyable part is having terrific colleagues who love working with children, it's an inspiration to bask in the glory of hearing and seeing the product of their work.' He also values the opportunity to teach, the privilege of helping to conduct the county youth orchestra, the buzz from balancing the budget and finding extra money to launch new activities, and the variety inherent in the job – 'there's never a dull moment'.

Despite the difficult decision Devon Music Service had to make last year, Parr is also keen to focus on the positive. 'I find it very satisfying when staff are putting forward their ideas and are obviously enthusiastic about the direction they would like to take and the opportunities they'd like to give to their students. It feels very pleasing to be able to facilitate that.'

'I also have to say that a particular bee in my bonnet is inspirational experiences, those special, unique moments that can really affect children dramatically,' he continues. 'I personally want to make as many of those as we can available for young people – indeed, *people* – in Devon. I think it's vital that we do this, because these are moments of direction-changing significance for people. It's a privilege to be involved in providing those.' ■

music Teacher

'I'm encouraging them to think of sounds in a poetic way, not just as noises. It's a completely new concept for them.'

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