

**Surrey Organists' Association**  
**Organ Student Scheme**

***PIANISTS:***

**PLAY THE ORGAN!**

**FREE TASTER LESSONS**

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***CHURCHES:***

**TRAIN YOUR OWN  
ORGAN STUDENT**

**[www.surreyorganistsassociation.org](http://www.surreyorganistsassociation.org)**

## **PLAY THE ORGAN!**

### *Why?*

It is a fine musical instrument, with a large range of different sounds and contrasting repertoire. You will have another outlet for your keyboard skills, developing finger strength and articulation. This helps, not hinders, your piano playing. There is a national shortage of organists, with their average age increasing. Many parishes report that it is difficult to find regular organists and deputies. When you have completed your training, you will be eligible for a fee for playing at services, varying between churches.

### *How?*

Take part in the SOA Scheme, developed from the one already running at West Byfleet & Pyrford – either as a student or a church.

### *Where?*

Either in your own church (if you have a useable organ) or in the teacher's church. If you have a prospective student but not a suitable instrument, they can be still be trained by one of the Scheme teachers.

### *How often are the lessons?*

The FREE taster lessons are every 2–3 weeks for 45 mins. As you become more familiar with the organ, every 2-4 weeks for  $\frac{3}{4}$  or 1 hour.

### *When do lessons take place?*

This is completely flexible, to suit the student, teacher and availability of the organ – during the day, in the evening or at weekends.

### *How much practice between lessons?*

This depends a lot on the student's individual circumstances – those working full time or who have young families may find it more difficult to spend time at the organ. In the early stages, much can be learnt (at home) on the piano. In an ideal world, 2 – 4 hours practice per week is recommended, but students have made good progress with less time.

### *Who could become an organ student?*

Anybody who has reasonable proficiency at the keyboard – experience shows that those who have gained Associated Board Grade 5 will progress quickly. Those with less proficient keyboard skills will benefit by improving these at the piano before or as well as starting the organ.

### *How much does this cost?*

Given the amazing initial success of the Scheme, the SOA is now offering **4 free taster lessons and £15 to cover music initially needed**. This offer depends on the student having suitable keyboard ability and ongoing support with a gradual introduction to service playing. It is also subject to funds being available in the budget, but please do not let this put you off applying!

Parishes are encouraged to set up their own ongoing support scheme. Training each student at W Byfleet and Pyrford costs around £500 - £600 per year, including provision of music (eg a jumble sale proceeds). Funds have been set up to provide this training free of charge for the first year. Elsewhere in the country, similar arrangements have been financed by generous individual donations, fund raising events such as jumble sales, concerts, or by grants. Students may also wish to pay their own way and should increasingly be expected to contribute anyway.

During training, which can be organized by their teacher, students generally do not receive a fee for playing. Once training has been completed it would be usual for the student – by now a competent organist – to receive the usual fee for services (=a supermarket shift?)

### *Who does the training?*

The SOA is delighted that a number of experienced and qualified local teachers around the area have initially offered to be involved. As at W Byfleet and Pyrford, an experienced parish organist may be willing to start the students off and teach for an initial period (eg around two years). Thereafter, once students have accomplished basic competences, they could be transferred to another tutor.

*How long does it take 'to learn to play the organ'?*

Depending on the skill and determination of the student, simple voluntaries can be played within 3 – 6 months & straightforward hymns (without pedals) within 6 – 12 months. In the second year it should be possible to play a small part in services – say the voluntary and a couple of hymns. From year 3 onwards, confident students will be able to play for a 'normal' Sunday service – as long as hymns are notified well in advance. It can take quite a long time to build repertoire for weddings and funerals where music varies from straightforward to (very) difficult, so full competence for these services may take longer. If it is possible to provide the support of an apprenticeship, even in the first year students have played for voluntaries and just one hymn, typically during communion which is less demanding than accompanying a congregation!

*What other support is available for students wanting to learn the organ?*

Support and encouragement is available both locally through the SOA ([www.surreyorganistsassociation.org](http://www.surreyorganistsassociation.org)), and nationally through the RSCM (Royal School of Church Music) and RCO (Royal College of Organists) who both offer courses and training events at all levels.

*I am interested – what should I do?*

Talk to your church and discuss with them what support (financial and practical) might be available. If they are willing to support you, then get in touch with Ian Church to arrange the FREE taster lessons and a teacher if necessary. If your local church cannot offer support, it is still worth getting in touch as you may be able to join the scheme through a different church.

**\*\* N.B. SOA are here to help solve any problems! Just ask! \*\***

Ian Church

President

Surrey Association of Organists

Phone 01483 564939

E [ianchurch@ntlworld.com](mailto:ianchurch@ntlworld.com)

[Director of Music, St John's Church, West Byfleet]