

## Gabrieli Roar Summer Residential Course Evaluation Report

### Introduction

During 2025-26, Gabrieli engaged an independent evaluator, Phyllida Shaw, to evaluate two Gabrieli Roar projects: the Roar Empower Summer Residential Course 2025 and Roar Evolve Baroque Masters (Spring 2026).

Gabrieli Roar delivers activity through a network of partnerships with youth choirs, schools and cathedrals across the country. The programme is constructed of four distinct strands:

**Roar Explore:** Single-day first-access workshops for organisations with limited current participatory singing provision.

**Roar Evolve:** Short baroque programmes, eg Purcell Dido & Aeneas, Vivaldi Gloria, accessible for all abilities.

**Roar Empower:** Annual residential courses offering progression opportunities, singing major oratorios such as Verdi's Requiem, Haydn's The Seasons and Handel's Saul, culminating in a final performance at Ely Cathedral.

**Roar New Leaders:** Training and professional experience developing workshop leadership skills in early career artists. In 2026-27 we expect to reach 8000 young participants, in addition to their teachers and choir directors.

This evaluation of the 2025 Roar Empower summer residential examines how the project achieves Gabriel's intended outcomes and examines a number of the evaluator's recommendations (highlighted in green) to increase impact.

### Course Fees and Structure

At £275 per participant, Gabrieli has deliberately set an affordable fee: this accessibility is a core value, cited as being central to organisational diversity and inclusion principles.

Additionally, there is no audition process. The emphasis is on an experience that is accessible, welcoming and inclusive. The result is a mixed ability range in which newer singers are carried along by the more experienced, who assume a 'leadership' role musically. Gabrieli's Vocal Faculty responds adeptly to the challenges that this presents.

Full and partial bursaries are made widely available. This year, 21% of participants received bursaries of up to 100% of the advertised cost, plus travel funding where necessary. All Pupil Premium Grant participants were immediately awarded bursaries; further individuals in need of support were identified by partner choirs, leveraging their detailed knowledge of individuals' circumstances.

During evaluation, few participants mentioned cost, but those who did acknowledged that it was 'cheap'. The choir leaders recognise the exceptional value for money.

If Gabrieli can maintain the current high levels of philanthropy for the project, the fee could remain static. However, a thorough interrogation of the price point, and the impact of increasing the fee whilst maintaining the bursary offer, is recommended. An additional £100 for each of the 163 singers who did not receive a bursary in 2025 would have contributed an additional £16,300.

All Gabrieli Roar projects are led by Artistic Director Paul McCreesh, supported by Creative Directors Emily Dickens & Charles Béquignon-MacDougall, a highly-experienced vocal faculty, pastoral team and management team.

Although principally focused on the rehearsal and performance of Haydn's secular oratorio *The Seasons*, course content was varied: tutti and sectional rehearsals were combined with a wealth of additional sessions developing technique and general musicianship. Sessions included skills workshops (eg *Sight reading practice; Navigating the Score; Music Appreciation and Enjoyment*), singing and conducting masterclasses, one-to-one singing lessons (for some participants their first ever) and social activities.

Within a wealth of positive feedback, participants' requests for changes fell into three categories:  
An extension of the residential, by one day, to include the day after the concert, enabling participants to celebrate together and say goodbye at a more relaxed pace.  
'More focused time with professionals': advanced masterclasses and singing lessons for the more experienced.  
More consistently good catering: some dietary requirement options were less well catered for.

Music is distributed to participants in late May to prepare for the course.

Staff and participant feedback indicates an appetite to receive music at the start of the summer term.

The residential, based in coastal Norfolk, attracted choirs from hundreds of miles away. Staff and participants recognised the high quality of the venue and accommodation. Whilst geographic location appears unimportant for

choirs, it may influence family members' attendance at the concert. 360 (61%) of the 590 ticketed audience at Ely cathedral were friends and family members.

Gabrieli should consider rotating residential locations to increase geographic reach and accessibility.

### Participants

204 singers aged 9-18 participated in the course either as part of their school or local choir, or as individuals.

Appendix 1 lists the participating choirs, their location, participant and staff numbers.

- Choirs came from seven of England's nine regions and brought between 4 and 35 singers.
- Only the West Midlands and the South East were not represented by a choir, although 9 individuals represented these regions.
- There were only two new partner choirs.

Appendix 2 shows students' gender and ethnic identities, how many were deaf/Deaf or disabled and how many received a financial bursary to enable them to take part. Key findings:

- 66% of participants had attended a previous course.
- Boys were under-represented relative to the English secondary school population in England (40% of participants, as opposed to 50% of the school population) but it is widely accepted that girls tend to outnumber boys in choirs, particularly at secondary level<sup>1</sup>.
- Global Majority representation (32%) was higher than the secondary school population (28%).

This course is growing in popularity and Gabrieli must consider how they will respond as future demand outstrips capacity, in order to deliver the greatest possible charitable impact.

Gabrieli could consider a number of mitigations, including asking choirs to attend only once every other year; reducing number of individual applicants (as opposed to those attending with their choir); Implementing an additional summer school.

### Roar New Leaders

While the value of the residential to the Roar New Leaders was clear (they gained a wealth of information solely through observation), their contribution to the Vocal Faculty's workload was questionable.

Gabrieli Roar needs to develop additional workshop leaders to support programme-wide activity delivery.

1. Clearer plans for how new leaders with varying prior experience are trained and deployed is needed.
2. Candidates need a role profile and to understand, clearly, what the opportunity will provide.

### Project Outcomes

Gabrieli's long-term goals are 'to enhance and transform lives through great music, celebrating and sharing music generously, and to increase access to classical music, challenging preconceptions and creating diverse, sustainable communities of people inspired and empowered to engage with culture in all its forms'.

In support of these goals, the residential course aims to achieve four short-term outcomes. Participant feedback has been examined for how it evidences Gabrieli's success in achieving these outcomes.

#### **Outcome 1: Mutually beneficial partnerships with regional organisations enhance local singing provision.**

This outcome is principally achieved in other activity streams, which operate in the choir's own locality. However, the breadth and longevity of partnerships involved in the residential course ensure relevance to this outcome, providing:

- opportunities that partners cannot offer in isolation, e.g. larger-scale repertoire;
- musical skill and confidence development: even if only part of a choir attends, this development in individuals impacts choir standards as a whole, delivering indirect local benefit;
- continuous Professional Development to choir directors, improving local provision;
- opportunities for an informal network of choir directors, creating peer support and new collaborations.

*'Gabrieli Roar [has] been transformational across our programme - engaging hundreds of our choir members with thrilling projects that have broadened horizons, taken us to some incredible venues, developed our team's musical practice and most importantly really inspired the participants.'*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.musicteacher magazine.co.uk/content/features/breaking-the-silence-getting-and-keeping-boys-singing>

**Outcome 2: Young people enjoy the benefits of new and increased access to classical music, from first access experiences to transformational progression opportunities, singing repertoire beyond a single youth choir.**

The project provided an opportunity for participants to sing a large-scale choral work. The words 'difficult' and 'challenging' were used. The scale of the event, the experience of singing with soloists and an orchestra in Ely Cathedral, appears to have made more of an impact than the specific repertoire.

*'Being able to sing such huge works is the defining feature of Roar. It is exhilarating to be part of a choir with so many others. I think standing up for applause after singing in Ely Cathedral might be one of the best feelings in the world.'*

*'It's like magic. Thanks to the hard work of the vocal faculty, you somehow go from not knowing a score at all to performing it at a professional level within six days, whilst feeling confident and having the time of your life! Everyone comes away from the final concert having confidently performed a really tricky piece and feeling on top of the world!'*

*'The piece this year wasn't as incredible as last year's, but then it takes a lot to beat Verdi's Requiem. I feel like the concert was a wonderful experience though and the piece sounded much better during performance.'*

*'I found rehearsals very informative and enjoyed using my voice to its fullest, and challenging it with such a great piece.'*

The following feedback suggests that the sixth form students who self-selected to be part of the chamber choir may have experienced it as 'a transformational progression opportunity'.

*'I learnt so much about the ways that the voice functions ... Chamber Choir is one of the best parts because it allows us to look at other musical styles beyond classically choral, like a cappella etc. with literal legends like Charles and Emily, who push and encourage us so well to get the best performance and songs off copy after just a few half hour sessions.'*

*'I love the access to professional help and assistance, in particular with the chamber choir, being able to focus on different technical content in a focused environment.'*

Choir leaders, who are best placed to observe the difference the residential makes to the individuals in their choir and to the group as a whole, offered testimonials as to Gabrieli Roar's impact:

*'Every individual is so different, yet we are all there for the same purpose, bringing us together. The music we can make together is incredible and something which I think is difficult to replicate ... anywhere else.'*

*'The summer school brings choirs and schools, which are all at different points in their musical careers, together, and it doesn't matter if you are really new to singing or if you've been doing it for ages, we all have the same goal and we all want the end result to be as good as it can be.'*

**Outcome 3: Participants and partners enjoy a healthy, empowering learning environment in which excellence is recognised and celebrated.**

Choir leaders and participants alike describe Roar as offering a learning environment unavailable elsewhere, citing the warm welcome, inclusive, encouraging tone, supportive atmosphere and the emotional intelligence and energy of the pastoral staff. People also acknowledge the quality of the teaching, the course structure and variety of content, and the quality of both the residential and concert venues.

Participants commended the mix of musical activities and the opportunity to participate in everything on offer. They acknowledged the 'busy' schedule as being essential to the success of the performance. The activities they frequently referred to as 'fun' helped to ensure their continued focus and energy, and social cohesion.

The supportive, can-do, youth-oriented environment, underpinned by the pastoral team, made participants feel secure. Singers with initial doubts and anxieties were individually reassured and encouraged with each session: as they recognised what they were achieving musically, their confidence grew. Being with 200 other young people who love singing was inspiring.

*'I think the positivity of the staff is what sets it aside from other residentials. The activities and timetable were well thought out and we were looked after fantastically. I never saw someone on their own or looking out of place.'*

*'Everyone has such amazing expertise, allowing us to truly master our voices, enjoy singing, and learn new skills. ...it is a long course and goes into depth on one piece, but also has many other activities. I don't know many courses like that.'*

*'The atmosphere is incredible. Every member of the team is so, so supportive ... everyone is made to feel at home.'*

A recurring response from some of the older students and from those who had taken part in a Gabrieli residential before was their appreciation of being treated as young adults and as professional or aspiring professional singers.

*'I think the way Paul treats us as professionals is unique, as most other places don't expect as much from young people'  
'I think it's such a great way to encourage young singers. Not only do they not treat us like we are incompetent five year olds, but they recognise our skills as young people, which I love.'*

It is clear that participants understand Paul McCreesh's approach, which he himself describes as, *'It's about treating them as adults, giving them license to be the best version of themselves.'*

One of the choir leaders, a secondary school teacher who has taken part before, wrote:

*'The staff ... are there for the students to support and make it as good an experience as possible. .... Having specialists on hand really elevates the experience... Paul is so involved and he doesn't just turn up on the day and perform. He has a wonderful way with the students and they adore him. ... Charles and Emily are so talented and work so well together - seeing a creative team gel so well demonstrates to young, impressionable people what is possible.'*

*'I love the fact that we get to work with such skilled and experienced staff...My favourite parts are probably the masterclasses and the singing lessons because it's a chance to expand my understanding and skill and I can apply it in rehearsals... I feel like it helps make sure we're all on the same level. I do wish the singing lessons were a bit longer, but I understand that it may be hard to fit so many people in.'*

*'All of the evening masterclasses were excellent and I enjoyed learning to conduct and having a personalised session where I could perfect my voice, to enjoy using it to its fullest.'*

#### **Outcome 4: Participants' musical ability and confidence, social and personal skills, and happiness improve.**

More than half of respondents referred directly to impact of the residential on their musical and/or social skills and confidence and the two were frequently linked. They wrote about working alongside others 'in the same boat', making friends, meeting people from other parts of the country and getting to know the members of their own choir. For some, the experience helped them to realise that they could be away from home for almost a week and thrive.

Choir leaders and participants alike acknowledge the value of seeing that their musical passion is shared by others:

*'it is a way for like-minded teens to socialise and come together to reach a goal, making new friends for life.'*

*'Compared to other choral courses ... Gabrieli allows for people of vastly varying age and ... singing journey to come together and learn with one another. There is plenty of support from staff and other young singers and it's an amazing place to meet other young people with similar interests, making connections and friendships ... that last.'*

*'I have made new friends and connections as well as finding my own person and gaining confidence through music which I'd never thought I would achieve, and I probably wouldn't have achieved it without Roar, so thank you.'*

*'The project has been a huge boost to my confidence. From giving my all to every chorus to taking part in a masterclass, I feel like a I have gained an ability to really hold my own. My sightreading skills have also really improved.'*

*'I've become a lot closer to other people in my choir and school group who I wouldn't typically talk to. Gabrieli has encouraged me to branch out and talk to others. I've also noticed it is such an encouraging and lovely environment to be in. I've been complimented and given more compliments than I think I've ever experienced.'*

*'I have made lots of friends and learnt lots of vocal techniques which I did not know before I came. It has also given me confidence because now I know I can be away from home and be alright.'*

*'It's longer than a normal residential which is good, because I can actually settle in and it's also cheap to afford. You also can talk with other people from different choirs so that you have friends everywhere and in the evening they have really fun activities so that it doesn't get boring.'*

Participants felt that the course developed their musical ability.

*'I feel a better musician and can take more ownership of my part. I understand ... my voice [and how] I should use it.'*

*'The residential helped a lot with my reading of the score and getting comfortable with the music.'*

*'[I've gained] confidence in sight reading and the confidence to sing, even when I'm unsure if it's correct'*

*'my vocal technique has greatly improved ... My ability to read a score improved with the sectionals and tutti rehearsal.'*

## Outcome 5. Individuals' and communities' love and understanding of classical music grows.

The opportunity to perform unfamiliar repertoire, the learning environment offered by the residential, the range of activities, the quality of the teaching and participants' experience of becoming better musicians are all likely to have contributed to their 'love and understanding of classical music'. The following appreciations from two choir leaders emphasise how Gabrieli nurtures young people's love and understanding of classical music.

*'An amazing experience which has had a huge impact, in a short space of time. These kinds of opportunities are all too rare these days... The price to participate is affordable for most parents, which makes it accessible... I am hugely grateful for the additional bursaries... the support x received from both the way this course is structured and the individual team members he interacted with made it possible for him to succeed musically.'*

*'The Gabrieli Roar Residential gives students an opportunity away from home (sometimes for the first time) to do something they love. The whole set-up is about the students enjoying the experience from the second they get up to the second they finally fall asleep (and rinse and repeat!). ... There is not one child who doesn't come out of the performance without the biggest smile and buzz as it dawns on them what they have achieved.'*

### Summary of proposals for consideration

**Course fees:** An additional £100 per non-bursary participant would leverage an additional £16,300 in income.

- ❖ Gabrieli are assessing the impact on income of different price points
- ❖ Gabrieli will discuss with partners how this might increase bursary requests, and consider whether this would require a more formalised bursary process, raising questions of administrative burden and accessibility.

**Extended course length** enabling a post-concert celebration and more relaxed farewell

- ❖ Regrettably this represents significant additional cost and other investments will be prioritised first.

**Increased learning time with professionals for more experienced singers**

- ❖ In such a busy course, scheduling more sessions is difficult but we will examine what is possible. To pursue this, we will need to identify corresponding content for less experienced participants.

**Improved catering responding to dietary requirements**

- ❖ This feedback has been given to Gresham's School; we will monitor improvements with participant feedback.

**Roar New Leaders**

- ❖ Age and ability level changed: this will now be a graduate opportunity (not for all alumni over 18).
- ❖ We will create a role profile, articulating expectations and opportunities and further possible training.
- ❖ Correspondingly, we are developing a more rigorous recruitment process to support these changes.

**Earlier distribution of music**

- ❖ Gabrieli to move dissemination of course materials forward, as requested.
- ❖ We note that one complex aspect of the mixed ability group is that participants arrive having undertaken different levels of preparation. By distributing music earlier, are we widening this gap? We will monitor the impact of this.

**Rotation of course locations** to increase geographic reach and accessibility.

- ❖ We acknowledge the difficulty for some of getting to Gresham's; for this reason we provide travel bursaries and overnight accommodation part-way through the return journey for some. We will investigate alternative venues for 2027, but note that there are few venues of Gresham's calibre (this a point of frequent positive feedback); the efficiency of staff operating in a known setting with efficient partners is key to delivering the project with a small workforce; and many venues have long-term multi-year contracts with language schools; venue choice is quite limited.

**Tackling over-subscription**

- ❖ Strategic consideration is currently being given to the ideas of asking choirs to attend in rotation (every other year) and implementing an additional summer school.
- ❖ We feel that it is crucial to continue to serve the (relatively new) cohort of individuals, because individuals joining us on their own rather than as part of a choir is indicative of a lack of local opportunity.

**With thanks**

We are grateful to everyone who gave their feedback as part of this evaluation, and particularly to Phyllida Shaw for conducting the process with such insight and rigour.

Gabrieli Roar, Autumn 2025

## Appendix 1: Choirs and individuals taking part in 2025

Name of choir	Place and official region	Singers	Staff
Bishop Wordsworth's School	Salisbury, Wiltshire (South West)	14	1
Chesterton Community College	Cambridge (East of England)	9	2
David Ross Education Trust	Loughborough (East Midlands)	26	4
Diocese of Leeds	Leeds (Yorkshire and the Humber)	26	3
Diocese of Salford	Salford (North West)	7	2
Downham Market Academy (new)	Downham Market (East of England)	4	1
Egglescliffe School	Stockton-on-Tees (North East)	35	2
Legacy Choir	Plymouth (South West)	14	2
Redbridge Youth Choir (new)	London	13	2
Sawston Village College	Cambridgeshire (East of England)	11	2
Individuals	Various	45	0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>

## Appendix 2: Participant profile (rounded to the nearest 1%)

Participants (204)	Number	%
<i>Gender identity</i>		
Female	120	59
Male	81	40
Non-binary	3	1
Identify with a gender different to the one assigned at birth. These numbers are included in the those above.	4	2
<i>Ethnic identity</i>		
White	138	68
Black / Black British	33	16
Asian / Asian British	17	8
Mixed	8	4
Prefer not to say	8	4
Speaking a main language other than English at home	19	9
Identify as deaf/Deaf or disabled	1	0.5
An additional bursary from Gabrieli further reduced the fee so that they could attend	41	20

## Appendix 3: Methodology

Quantitative data was collected by Gabrieli. Qualitative data was collected by the evaluator by various means:

- ❖ individual interviews with Gabrieli Roar staff in advance, and a post-project debrief with the full team;
- ❖ observation of a day at Gresham's School (20 July 2025) and the rehearsal- and performance-day at Ely;
- ❖ spontaneous feedback from singers (self-recorded on iPads), choir leaders and Roar staff during the course;
- ❖ 102 written responses to a post-project survey sent to every participant on 23 July;
- ❖ emails from choir leaders to Gabrieli in the weeks after the event.

As this annual project falls at the start of the school summer holiday, a survey is likely to receive limited responses. We therefore asked participants to answer a small number of questions 'on the way home', on paper or via QR code (most widely used), and urged choir leaders to encourage responses. This secured a very good response rate of 50%.

The participants were asked,

- 'What have you got out of taking part in this Gabrieli Roar Residential, musically, socially or in any other way?' and
- 'What do you think is different or special about the Gabrieli Roar Residential?'

Some answers can be linked to more than one outcome. For example, a comment describing feelings of joy and achievement supports outcome 2 (increased access to classical music, singing repertoire beyond the scope of any single youth choir), outcome 4 (musical confidence...and happiness improve) and outcome 5 (individuals' love and understanding of classical music grows). More than half of survey respondents referred directly to social as well musical gains. While these comments clearly support outcome 4, with its reference to 'social and personal skills and happiness', they also relate to outcome 3, and the 'healthy, empowering learning environment' that promotes an increase in social and personal skills and happiness. Therefore, the evidence offered in support of each outcome should not be read as the only evidence of that outcome, or as supporting that outcome alone.