

## Trust Schools and Business Partners – Guidance Note

This guidance note is intended to support schools in developing an effective approach to business involvement in a Trust School. It focuses on five key areas to consider when researching and talking to business partners.

### 1. Build a business case for support

In forging partnerships with businesses, it's worth learning to speak the same language. Too often partnerships flounder when neither partner properly understands the objectives of the other. A partnership between a Trust school and a business must be mutually beneficial to succeed, it's essential to view the partnership from the business's perspective.

Before approaching a company, work out why they might want to support you. 'Traditionally organisations have become involved in education for three reasons: to educate young people around specific issues and build skills (*for example charity campaigns or government initiatives*); to feed directly into their business (*for example recruitment, staff development or educational sales*); or to build relationships that enhance long-term brand equity (brand value)<sup>1</sup>.

Companies often state the reasons for getting involved with education and the community on their websites. These are a good source for ideas to build a case for business involvement in your school.

### 2. Build your hit list

Think carefully about whom you would like to approach as potential partners for your Trust School. Always remember the school's existing relationships. For example, specialist status sponsors, parents, businesses who have been involved in careers or enterprise activities and alumni. School governors and businesses who offer pupils work experience placements are also a good starting point. Approaches to companies that already work with the school in some way have a higher success rate.

If you are approaching a company for the first time consider looking beyond local multi-nationals and FTSE 100 companies. Unless there is a natural link with these companies competition for their support can be fierce. Think about other employers in your area – finding a copy of the local business directory and investigating some of the less obvious targets is a good idea.

### 3. Making an approach

Like schools, businesses receive many calls on their time and resource. Your approach should be tailored carefully to the company's own agenda and core values to stand a chance of being looked at properly. Can you list the benefits to the business for getting involved with the Trust? Ask why they want to be involved in education and listen to the answer

Build rapport and avoid education jargon. The workings of a school Governing Body, the attainment at KS3 and the 14-19 agenda will mean little to a business. By avoiding jargon you will help the business get to grips quickly with how they can support you and how you can benefit them.

Be positive about the proposed Trust and be clear about how it will benefit young people at the school.

<sup>1</sup> September Edition 2006, *the assignment report*. Copyright MediaTaylor 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The Council for Corporate and School Sponsorship

Many companies will want a clear idea of the level of commitment required, e.g. meetings to attend, possible curriculum projects etc. This is not an excuse to recite a wish list. Be prepared to answer the question, but be clear that these are only suggestions and you are keen to discuss alternatives and would like to hear the business's views and ideas. Emphasise that you are not asking for money.

Avoid being apologetic. Individuals and businesses want to be associated with success. A positive and enthusiastic approach can achieve much more and makes the prospect appealing and exciting to a partner.

#### **4. Successful partnerships – the business viewpoint**

According to interviews with business leaders, individuals who create partnerships should focus on the following:

- 'Recognise that partnerships are both a process and a product
- Establish a clear mission
- Determine mutual needs
- Secure top management support and commitment
- Clearly define expectations, roles and responsibilities
- Identify services and available resources
- Set realistic goals
- Emphasise clear communication
- Create an on-going monitoring and evaluation system'<sup>2</sup>

#### **5. Tips for implementing and sustaining the partnership**

- Always identify a key contact in your school for the business partner. The school contact should be contactable in business hours. A person with extensive teaching commitments is likely to be unsuitable.
- Keep moving forward and do not allow plans to flounder. This will cause frustration and reduce good will, which may result in the partner pulling out. Remember that bureaucracy and lengthy meetings without tangible outputs are not welcomed by businesses.
- Work with your partner at the outset to develop a concise written document outlining outcomes, benchmarks, measures of progress, roles and responsibilities etc. This serves to confirm what both partners will undertake and can be used as a yardstick against progress.
- Create opportunities for teachers, students and business employees to interact at school and on business sites.
- Communications about partnerships should allow opportunities for private and public recognition of both parties. Remember to mention partners in newspaper articles etc.
- Encourage feedback from students to the business partner
- Make businesses feel part of school life. Send the school newsletter, invite to school productions etc
- Keep talking and listening! Continue to ask businesses if they are getting what they want out of the partnership.

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