


Engagement between schools and business is vital

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The experience of those in the front line is that schools are being required to do more with less. Whilst petitions to government to provide adequate public funding continue, the reality is that schools are being forced to make difficult financial decisions or find innovative ways of alternative income generation to balance their books.

Business can offer their skills, knowledge and experience to schools in collaborative ways. One way is to support staff to volunteer in school governance. This might be as school governors of maintained schools which are run by the local authority. However, many schools (known as academies) are now run by academy trusts, which are charitable companies limited by guarantee. Academy trusts are not affiliated to any local authority and are, instead, directly managed by the Department for Education, via the Education Skills and Funding Agency. Academy trusts require members, trustees/directors and local governors, all of whom are unpaid volunteers. A typical academy trust running, say, 5 academy schools is likely to need around 60 individual volunteers to support their governance model.

Organisations, such as Inspiring Governance and Governors for Schools, have developed resources designed to assist businesses to establish employee governance schemes. These organisations can also help to match volunteers to schools that have governance vacancies.

So, what's in it for business? Actively promoting school governance to staff could form a key part of a business' corporate social responsibility profile. There are also real opportunities for employees to develop skills and experience in school governance that are directly transferable into their professional roles. Examples include: strategic planning, analysing data, risk management, setting and overseeing budgets, staff recruitment and retention and complaint handling.

With many academy trusts looking to take on more schools or merge with other academy trusts, staff may also gain practical insights into the commercial considerations of business acquisitions and mergers. Employees who join academy trusts as trustees/directors will develop a hands-on understanding of the duties of a company director and charity trustee.

In this challenging financial environment, the education sector has a lot to learn from the corporate world. Business, too, has the opportunity to participate in the education sector in exciting new ways which can benefit everyone.

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