

Why work with Schools?

A brief guide for small and medium-sized enterprises



London Central
Education Business Alliance

Small businesses are the lifeblood of British business. They contribute over 50 per cent of total UK turnover, employing 12 million people nationwide.

Many children currently in school will one day start businesses of their own, or work in small businesses. So it's vital students experience the world of small business for themselves, while they are still at school.

That's where you can help - by becoming a small business partner to a local school.

It doesn't have to mean a huge time commitment – just one hour a year can make a difference. In fact, you don't even have to leave your desk! Yet your involvement can bring the world of small business to life for the next generation of entrepreneurs.

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How your business can benefit

But it's not just the school that benefits. Working with schools is good for your business too. Here are just some of the ways it can help your business.

Increasing staff morale – employees enjoy working with schools, and staff who feel good about their workplace tend to be more motivated and loyal to the company.

Developing skills – working with schools gives your staff a chance to develop their skills in areas such as leadership, teamwork and communication.

Talent spotting – if you help to develop young people's competences you're increasing the skills of your future employees.

Enhancing reputation – working with schools is good for your company's image, and it may lead to new business opportunities.

Increasing expertise – give your company a unique insight into the world of education today and how young people are being prepared for work.

Reducing costs – save on costly training courses by giving your staff real-life learning experiences instead!

Relationships between businesses and schools are varied and unique. The benefits are equally wide-ranging.

Case study: Who's doing it? – Becoming a mentor

Dipo Olawole runs a successful small media services company, which takes up most of his time. But he still finds time each week to mentor Robert, 17, a young student who needs motivation and guidance if he is to achieve his full potential.

Dipo's family were supportive and encouraging when he was a student. But Dipo knows not all young people are so lucky. By becoming a mentor, Dipo hopes he can guide and motivate Robert to continue with his studies and set himself challenging goals for the future too.

They meet for 30-40 minutes a week at Robert's school. Dipo and Robert share similar British African backgrounds, which means Dipo is an excellent role model. Dipo loves mentoring, and is supported every step of the way by his mentoring co-ordinator.

By becoming a mentor Dipo admits he's learning about himself and his skills as a communicator and listener. Like all good education-business partnership, both sides benefit.

“Business support for education is crucial, particularly in London where schools face unique challenges.”

Can you make a difference?

The answer is definitely yes! Your company may be small but your potential to contribute isn't. By getting involved you will be playing a key part in motivating and inspiring young people.

Business support for education is crucial, particularly in London where schools face unique challenges. Your involvement can help in many ways. It can:

- give students opportunities and insights into the world of work
- support the National Curriculum in areas such as enterprise skills and citizenship
- support the teaching of numeracy, literacy and other core subjects
- provide role models for young people
- raise students' aspirations and achievement.

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Case Study: Who's doing it? – Reading and number partners

Every Tuesday lunchtime, around 20 staff from data management company QAS visit a nearby primary school to help children with their reading and numeracy.

"It all started when we received a brochure through the post encouraging businesses to become reading and number partners," says Thanj Kugananthan of QAS. "We felt this would be beneficial to our company's programme of corporate social responsibility."

To begin with QAS was a little worried that staff would not be able to meet their 'hour a week' commitment, especially sales staff who have demanding targets to meet. But in reality it has caused few problems and the number of volunteers is growing each month!

Reading partners help children aged 6-7 with their reading and spelling, while number partners play number games with children aged 9-10, to help develop their mathematical skills.

"Our staff enjoy taking part in this as they feel that they are contributing towards the local community, and it also gives them an opportunity to get away from their desks and to do something different during their working day," says Thanj.

"We felt this would be beneficial to our company's programme of corporate social responsibility."

Thanj Kugananthan of QAS.

What can you do?

There are many ways you can get involved. Much will depend on the nature of your business and the level of commitment you want to make. Here are some ideas to get you thinking:

Primary volunteering.

If you've got one hour a week to spare, you could become a volunteer reader in a local school.

Work experience.

Could you invite a student into your workplace for a week? Work experience gives young people a chance to learn about a range of careers and work skills. It's an excellent way to help without leaving your building!

Mentoring.

Mentoring involves supporting a student one-to-one through their final year of school. All you need to do is encourage, guide, share experiences and listen - without being a parent or a teacher.

e-mentoring.

As above, without even having to leave your desk! As an e-mentor you'd be paired with a student to offer e-mail support once or twice a week.

Curriculum support.

Bringing lessons to life by talking to students about curriculum topics such as business plans and enterprise.

Careers events.

Careers awareness events benefit enormously from the input of local companies. Your involvement could be anything from giving a presentation about your company to running a stand at a careers fair.

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Before you start

If you are interested in working with schools, there are plenty of organisations waiting to help and support you. Why not start by contacting London Central Education Business Alliance (www.businesses-schools-together.com).

You'll be joining a network of other businesses who share your commitment to supporting students at school – at the same time as benefiting your business too. Right at the outset here are some considerations to bear in mind.

What do you want to achieve?

You may just want to be a good corporate citizen or you may have more focused objectives, such as staff training or public relations. It's useful to identify your reasons for getting involved.

How much time do you want to commit?

Very important, because this will determine the type of project that will suit you.

What skills do you have to offer?

You may have a particular area of expertise to share, or 'soft skills' to offer in activities such as primary volunteering.

Where do you want the activity to take place?

Some activities involve spending time at the school - others require no travel. You need to decide which is the most practical solution for you. Bear in mind, while you are thinking about these issues, that schools will have their own needs. The more flexible you can be, the more helpful your contribution!

About us

The London Central Education Business Alliance (LCEBA) promotes joint working between schools and businesses in central London through a range of structured education business activities.

An alliance of 14 organisations, the LCEBA is funded by the Learning and Skills Council to deliver education business links in central London. We offer a wide range of activities to schools and businesses in Camden, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Southwark, Wandsworth and Westminster.

We work with businesses of all sizes, from sole traders to multinationals – together with primary and secondary schools, sixth forms, FE Colleges and pre-school children.

How can we help you?

If you've read this far, you're probably interested, but you still have plenty of questions.

To find out more, contact **Kevin Simmonds** at **London Central Education Business Alliance** (LCEBA) who will be able to offer you all the advice and support you'll need.

Telephone **020 7641 1301** or email ksimmonds@westminster.gov.uk

You can also find out more by joining the Business Club on the LCEBA website at www.businesses-schools-together.com

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