

Worthing High School Case study.

Worthing High is a mixed comprehensive school with 900 students aged 12 to 16. It is a Trust School, with Business and Enterprise Specialist Status. Examination results improve year on year. (In 2009, 71% 5+ A* to C. 60 % including English and Maths. Both well above national average, and both up by 10 percent from 2008)

Employer engagement at Worthing High.

This is a school which for a long time has placed employer engagement high in its priorities.

Assistant Headteacher Steve Lyons, who leads Vocational Development, says,
“We’ve always wanted to be part of the community, reaching out, and the way we’ve done it is through links with business. We recognized here very early that if our young people are to survive in the marketplace, they have to have properly oriented business skills.”

Chair of Governors Tony Cohen adds

“If you’re realistic you know you can’t give a rounded education just from within the teaching world. There has to be involvement from the outside. It might be through, charities, or sports clubs, but it may also be from business.”

The partnership at Worthing High works at a number of levels – in the make-up of the school’s Trust, in its Business and Enterprise specialist status, in the Business Partners Forum hosted by the school, in sponsorship, curriculum planning, visits to workplaces and direct classroom involvement.

All of it was well established at Worthing High long before the school had its Business and Enterprise specialist status. All Key Stage Four students take the GCSE Business and Communication Systems course, for example, as a core subject together with English Science and Maths. There’s also a Personal, Social and Vocational Education course for all students, as well as a range of BTec and GCSE Options. And beginning in September 2009, the school became one of the first to begin teaching the Business Administration and Finance Diploma. The school’s Chair of Governors, Tony Cohen, who runs a financial advisory business locally is a national “Diploma Champion” for this Diploma and was heavily engaged in its development.

Employers in the Classroom.

What’s particularly striking at Worthing High, is the routine presence of employers in the classroom.

Two initiatives, particularly, stand out.

- The HSBC Mentoring Scheme.

HSBC Invoice Finance UK, based in Worthing, has an innovative and mutually beneficial mentoring partnership with Worthing High. Eight HSBC people at a time give an hour and a half a week to groups of 25 Year 10 and 11 students. Every Key Stage Four student takes part in the scheme, which leads up to a one-to-one interview at the HSBC offices. By Summer 2009, 1400 students and 60 HSBC staff had taken part in this scheme

Glenn Souter, who leads the scheme for HSBC, says,

“We cover CV writing, interviews, teamwork. The key thing for me is that the students react differently to someone outside school. They ask different questions.”

- The NSure Financial Literacy Scheme.

Richard Cohen, a planner with local finance sector company NSure, runs his own financial literacy course for all Key Stage 4 students. It covers housing,

debt, savings, insurance – all the practicalities that young people will encounter as they leave school.

Richard says,

“Today I’ve been talking about how to manage debt, and the pros and cons of saving. In my job I see so many people who’ve screwed up financially, and the aim is to stop these young people from making that kind of mistake.”

Steve Lyons knows that having the business person supplementing the work of the teacher is going to be hugely important in the Business Administration and Finance Diploma.

“It’s having someone to come and say, ‘I know Mr Lyons tells you this is important, but actually this is the aspect of it that I see’.”

Building the relationship.

That level of partnership, though -- Steve Lyons calls it “a symbiotic relationship” -- isn’t easy to achieve, and it takes time. The Worthing experience shows up two necessary elements –

- The relationship has to be two way – benefits for the business as well as for the school.
- There has to be support for employers coming into the classroom.

Key to both of these aspects is the work of Rhys Price, Worthing High’s Director of Enterprise.

“I think it’s wrong of any school just to go in to a business and ask ‘What can you do for us?’ Businesses are inundated with that. We’ve been successful because we’ve been able to show benefits, for example, for professional development within the business, and for the training of their own staff.”

This is particularly so in the case of the relationship with HSBC. Worthing HS staff are involved in the mentoring and appraisal of HSBC colleagues, and in delivering foreign language tuition to them. HSBC see benefits for communication skills, too. Says Glenn Souter “I say if you can present in front of a class you can present to anybody. They’re the most honest audience you can have.”

Rhys Price also helps visiting employers to prepare for their classroom work.

“I do teaching and learning sessions with them – what makes a good lesson or presentation. That gives them confidence to deliver.”

It’s important, he says, to make direct links with the curriculum. So people from GlaxoSmithKline and from Southern Water, for example, contribute to aspects of the science curriculum.

Always, though, says Rhys, it’s necessary to keep an open mind.

“You may have something in mind, then when you’ve explored the possibilities the issue may change.”

Sustainability.

The aim is to build relationships that can be sustained long-term.

Rhys Price says, “We have businesses working with us week in, week out, many times in the academic year.”

Timing is important, says Rhys, when it comes to building classroom employer engagement into the timetable.

“I put the sessions on first thing in the morning, so they can come straight from home to school. If I put it on in the afternoon, there’d be times when they couldn’t come because of something happening at work. So we do it first thing. It’s a small factor but it’s important.”

Leadership commitment.

Experience at Worthing High shows the importance of running employer engagement from within senior leadership.

Rhys Price, Director of Enterprise, says,

“You have to have somebody from school who’s able and willing to make things happen, and has the commitment and the drive to see it through.”

He’s constantly alert for new opportunities, as the school moves forward with the Diploma.

“I network a lot,” he says. “I keep in touch with the Chamber of Commerce, the Education Business Partnership, seeing what’s out there, keeping my finger on the pulse.

Tony Cohen reinforces the importance of the school being responsive and committed to the relationship.

“You expect the school to acknowledge business support within the community. You want openness and clear ongoing dialogue about how things are going. Above all you want to feel a genuine part of the school community.”

(The school’s very professional looking “Business and Community Newsletter”, produced by Rhys Price, is an important contribution to showing commitment and promoting openness. The Autumn 2009 edition carries an article by Glenn Souter on the HSBC project.)

Impact – the big question.

Is Worthing High’s impressive improvement in exam results related to the programme of employer engagement?

And what is the programme doing for other aspects -- behaviour, for example?

Unsurprisingly, it’s difficult to show clear evidence of the link. Experienced senior leaders, though, are well capable of making the appropriate professional judgments. So Rhys Price says,

“What we do see coming out are the soft skills. We’ve already picked up that the Colleges say Worthing High School students are the best prepared for interviews.”

He knows, too, that motivation is directly affected.

“The students enjoy engaging with people from what they call the real world. Whether it moves them on academically nobody can tell, but in the other benefits that we see, we know we’re making a difference.”

Worthing’s Headteacher, Alison Beer finds it impossible to measure objectively the impact of employer engagement. But, like Rhys, her experience and professional judgment tell a very positive story.

“Students have commented on the extra enjoyment and depth offered to their learning from being taught by specialists in the field of business. They tend to feel happier in their schooling generally and this leads them to improved behaviour. I’m also well aware that staff have gained a huge amount from association with the world of business and finance. It’s clarified their thinking and sharpened up their practice. So because they’re more confident in the classroom, there are improvements in learning outcomes.”