

E-mentoring

1. Business Partners

Finding business partners can be a full time job in itself and it can also be very frustrating when you get no response from a 100 letters that you have sent.

There's no secret remedy to finding partners but there are things you can do to give yourself the best chance of finding one then securing a long term working relationship.

Finding a Partner

You probably want one of two things. The first is normally funding for something and secondly support in the form of a gift. Either way the best person to speak to isn't generally the "Big Boss" or the chairman or even the managing director.

Companies do want to help but sometimes schools can be quite vague in what they are after so be clear and precise in asking for help. If you need a thousand pounds then say that, don't waffle and be honest.

Lastly, the best person in any company to speak to is generally head of PR or Human Resources. The reason they have this job is because they have above all else great listening skills and if anyone in the company will listen to your plea then it will be them. Also, if they can't help then they will know who can.

Long Term Partnerships

Schools always want to have business partners but you must remember that a partnership works both ways and should always be seen this way. We have over 30 relationships with PLC's and national companies and we have kept them going for many years.

The key to a successful partnership is open and honest communication so that all the parties involved are aware of what is happening at all times.

As with any relationship we must always make sure we are all on the same hymn sheet at all times. If something can't happen for whatever reason let your partner know. Don't leave things until the last minute and then panic.

You must remember that if a company has organised staff to support you then they are giving their time which in turn carries a monetary value.

The best rule of thumb is to plan, if you don't your partnership will struggle.

If we can help further then please give Sean Leigh a call on 024 76 705 469

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2. Safe and easy to use technology

There have been some weird and wonderful ideas around how e-mentoring should be facilitated. However, the best e-mentoring programmes are the ones that have safe and secure but easy to use technology.

Whenever we talk about students and the Internet or students working with adults then safety has to be the number one priority. This doesn't mean we have to be fanatical just sensible. The most secure and reliable system is to have all the mail to and from the student printed off, read and stored manually. Now let's have a reality check, there isn't a teacher in school today that has the time to do this so it's completely unrealistic to ask them to.

With this in mind there are electronic versions of what I have just described that can get you to this point. Here's how we have managed to create a workable and flexible e-mentoring environment.

1. Closed environment
2. Electronic Approval System (EAS)
3. Monitored Email
4. Monitored Forums
5. Anti spam, anti-virus

The above is not a definitive list but a long as you have them all in place then communication should flow freely but still have the parameters and security needed to ensure safety for the student and mentor.

You should also ensure that the students are able to use the technology that is being provided and that they are happy with it to. This is a very important consideration as we must remember who the end user is, it's not the school and it's not the teachers, it's the students.

Lastly, security must be in place and we all know that but remember that the e-mentoring you are running is also supposed to be fun. So don't scare your students and don't put them off because of politics. Make them aware that everything is monitored and checked and then let them develop their relationship knowing you as their monitor will oversee everything.

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3. Training - mentors, teachers, students and parents

This area is the key to success and will ultimately make the difference between success and failure.

We have seen and then taken over lots of projects that failed to produce the objectives set at the beginning of their particular programme. This isn't because the objectives were too far reaching or difficult it was generally because they were not shared with all the individuals taking part.

Training should never take place until the **school** has decided what its objectives are for the students taking part. Remember, the student is the end user so it's their goals and aspirations we are trying to address and meet.

Once the school's goals have been identified then training can take place.

There are lots of different manuals and training schemes relating to being a good mentor. However, be realistic. If your business partners are supplying you with office staff it's no good training them to work with students who want to be mechanics, it would be better to find some mechanics.

Make the training simple and easy to follow. You will find that mentors will generally have concerns about two main areas. The first will be security and the second will relate to "What are we going to talk about?" Make sure every mentor fully understand the schools objectives.

Students will have similar issues and want them clearly explained. At this point it's fair to say that if the students taking part aren't clear on why they are involved in the programme then it will have no momentum and be a failure. This happens in 7 out of 10 programmes but it is really easy to address, just tell the students what's expected of them from the start.

Teachers, all need to be fully up to speed on what the objectives are and how the technology being used actually works. Don't rely on one member of staff, if there out of school or off sick then your programme will not operate. This sounds like common sense but you would be amazed how many schools do this and then regret not training more than one teacher.

Parents, one of the most common mistakes in training is not to get the parents involved. If a parent fully understand why their son or daughter are getting involved then they will in most cases support their child. Not all parents will have lots of questions but some will. So hold a parents evening and show them what is going to be happening. It's not hard to do it just takes a little organising and management but it's well worth the time.

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4. CRB checking and confirmation

A non negotiable area when it comes to e-mentoring.

All e-mentors have to be enhanced CRB checked. Make this a core component of your programme.

- If anyone declines to be checked then don't allow them to take part.
- If a potential mentor claims to have been checked then ask to see their certificate. If it's not produced just get them checked again.
- Do not start your programme until you are sure all mentors have been checked. Just because you have sent the forms off doesn't mean they are cleared and ready to start.

The following statement says everything:

"The role of the Criminal Records Bureau is to reduce the risk of abuse by ensuring that those who are unsuitable are not able to work with children and vulnerable adults" - David Blunkett

If you are not sure then go to the CRB website and read everything.

www.crb.gov.uk

Or you can give us a call on: 024 76 705 469

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5. Internet and email policies

Whenever we meet a school their first paperwork we will ask to see is the school's Internet and email policy.

We have to remember the bigger picture at all times– we are talking about linking children with adults they don't know via the Internet!

Every precaution has to be taken into consideration and the first step on this ladder is having a strong Internet and email policy that the school and students abide by. If you don't currently have these policies in place then it is essential that these are developed as quickly as possible.

The link below has lots of good straight forward information that you can take change and use to build Internet and email policies.

<http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk/schools/?INDEX=ALL>

Topics typically covered by **internet** safety policies of the schools surveyed included:

- use of the **internet** in school, and sanctions for misuse
- use of email in school
- details of filtering systems, and monitoring carried out by the school
- advice on not giving out personal information
- strategy or policy for what to do if an incident or violation occurs
- other strategies for ensuring **internet** safety
- home-school liaison issues, including use of school email at home
- use of chat or SMS at school
- teaching or curriculum issues surrounding **internet** use
- recommended teaching resources for **internet** safety.