

SHARED VISION AND STRONG RELATIONS

Ambitious schools have ambitious development departments. Increasingly, professional fundraising is being understood as a supplement to fee-generated income and seen as integral to the realisation of school improvement objectives. **Marie Cahalane** speaks to Headington School's **Tim Edge** about what defines 'development'



Investing in your school's development activities is investing in the futures of your students. While it shouldn't be relied upon as an answer to budgetary short-falls, it's certainly an additional revenue stream that can be used to enhance education by helping schools to fund their strategic objectives.

According to the 2016 edition of the Independent Schools Financial Benchmarking Survey professional fundraising in UK schools has increased significantly, from £100m in 2011 to £190m in 2015. Such an increase demonstrates the importance of development within the sector. A dedicated development department is aligned with the school's objectives and stands alongside head and bursar with an eye to the future, bringing a pragmatic approach to making the school's vision happen.

The National Fundraising & Development Survey in UK Schools 2014 report states that it takes in the region of three-to-five years to establish a school's development department. I caught up with Tim Edge, director of development at Headington School and foundation director at the London Oratory school who, with 16 years of experience in school fundraising, is a well-known and accomplished figure in the sector and understands what it takes to ensure success.

THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT

"An effective development office will raise the profile of the school and bring its disparate constituencies closer to what the school is planning, doing and achieving," Tim explains. Development is integral to the school, a means of defining, developing and disseminating the school's ethos and vision within the school community and beyond. It also plays a central role in the school's future, enabling the school to expand and progress and offering current and prospective students increased opportunities. "It raises the funds required for both capital development and the provision of bursaries," Tim points out. »

The importance of a school's development office cannot be underestimated; its applications, and the subsequent benefits, are innumerable. As schools continue to aspire to excellence, strategic fundraising becomes an ever more important resource, as do the development departments that drives this. For example, Headington's Dance and Fitness Centre, a multi-million-pound venture, was funded by Tim's development department. Recognised as one of the best in the country, it was first conceived of as a sports hub that would enable students to develop their interests and disciplines.

But development isn't just great at enabling structural projects; it's also responsible for making the outstanding education offered by independent schools more accessible. Last month we spoke with Patrick Mulvihill of Uppingham School who told us about the bursaries being offered to help their students. King Edward's School, Birmingham, is another example of just this. June this year saw the school complete a £10m campaign aimed at doubling the number of assisted places in the school to enable 100 students to attend for free and another 100 to benefit from heavily-reduced fees; this is in addition to an ambitious building programme to develop and extend existing facilities.

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Following the publication of the *Etherington Review* into fundraising a new fundraising regulator is to be introduced with the aim of setting and promoting high standards in fundraising practice. There are two proposed changes that schools must be aware of:

1. A low level registration fee and a levy on schools based on their fundraising expenditure has been set out. What does this mean?
2. A Fundraising Preference Service (FPS), which gives the general public an opportunity to control who they may be contacted by, is also a concern as it could limit contact with potential donors.

Over the course of his career Tim has undertaken some impressive projects to the benefit of innumerable students. Headington's new Dance and Fitness Centre is one such development and has been described as the best of its kind. But Tim is quick to give credit where it's due and highlights the role played by the governors and senior leaders who signed off on a project he refers to as, "more left field than traditional" as well as the project design team and, most importantly, the donors because, at the heart of development is 'cultivation'; the fostering of relationships with alumni, parents and other stakeholders with the aim of securing support, financial or other, for the school. This is a pivotal point; the success of the development department depends on how relationships are cultivated and co-ordinated among these key stakeholders and how their willingness to support, and ability to understand, the school's vision is built.

This is Tim's responsibility. When asked if he has a personal mantra to guide his approach to development, he offers quite a few! 'Never assume...Sacred cows make the best burgers...The best is the enemy of the good' plus the Nike slogan 'Just do it!' His key message? Take action! As he says, "We can all spend far too much time intellectualising why we are not ready to do something."

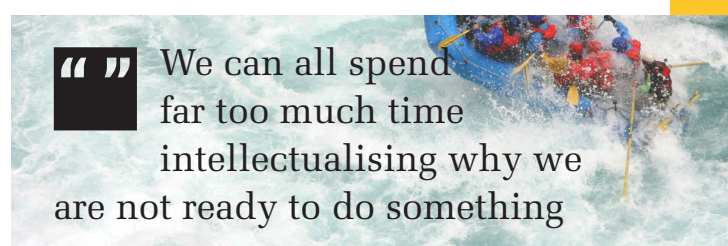


Recently the government proposed an initiative to foster more active working partnerships between independent and maintained schools. What are Tim's views on the subject?

This is obviously a contentious proposal that has already engendered much debate. I'm not convinced that the government is fully aware of how much active collaboration already exists between independent and maintained schools. A welcome product of this proposal, therefore, is that independent schools will become much more adept at quantifying and promoting the work they are already conducting with local state school partners. I think the language that the government uses is also important. At the moment many independent schools view this initiative as governmental coercion, with the chairman of HMC this week reported as likening the proposal to a 'forced marriage'. In terms of development work, any initiative that leads to independent schools re-evaluating the public benefit they provide is a good thing, particularly if it leads to an upsurge in funding for means-tested bursaries.

THE PRINCIPLES OF FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

A strong start – getting things off on the right foot – is crucial. A sure way of making this happen is to know where you want to end up – having a clear vision. "As somebody once said, if you don't know where you are going how will you know when you've got there?" Tim says. "Effective development programmes are founded on a comprehensive development strategy that should be reviewed regularly in the light of experience." Your strategic plan should involve governors and senior leaders, Tim advises, and, as a development officer, you must ensure that they can, and do, buy in to the direction of travel.



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While the strength of the development department is rooted in an efficiently-run database that effectively collects, records and analyses information, Tim stresses the importance of a personal connection to the wider school community. "The fundamental principal of development is to build effective and enduring relationships with individuals and organisations from which revenue will eventually flow." How do you do this? Tim suggests that you must enhance the lives of those close to your school, the immediate community, as this will encourage them to support you financially – and to do so more than once. "It's this essential 'cultivation' activity which is the bedrock on which all great development work is founded," he says.

At Headington they have developed a successful approach. "We have formed a 'Headington Association' which offers news of the school and a range of imaginative events to everyone in the wider school community." The aim is to inculcate what Tim calls a 'community of goodwill' through these activities and to forge longer-term connections between friends, alumni, supporters and the school.

THE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

So what advice would Tim offer to his younger self as he started out on this development career? "Be true to yourself, have the courage of your professional convictions and stand up for what you believe to be right. Also, even if self-publicity seems like anathema to you, you have to find a way to skilfully manage the internal PR – don't assume that significant audiences will always be aware of the important and exciting things that you and your department are doing!"

After all, the art of development lies in the ability to create and share a vision, to cultivate and secure donors who are not a one-off but believe in the cause and are willing to join you on your school's long term journey of improvement. ■