

**Higher Education
Sponsored
Academies,
University
Technical Colleges
and Free Schools**

**Report to HEFCE
by York
Consulting Ltd**

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Further information

Further information on becoming an academy sponsor can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sponsor-an-academy>.

Information about opening a University Technical College can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/opening-a-utc>.

Information about opening a free school can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/opening-a-free-school>.

You can also contact the Regional Schools Commissioner's (RSC) Office for your area to find out more. Email contact details for each RSC Office can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/schools-commissioners-group> or you

can contact the Department for Education on their national helpline.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

1. This is the final report from a qualitative research study exploring the experiences of 20 Higher Education (HE) providers involved in the establishment, development and sponsorship of academies, University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and free schools¹. The study was commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and took place between December 2015 and March 2016.
2. Collectively, the 20 HE providers are broadly representative of HE providers nationally in terms of tariff and size. Six of the nine English regions are represented in the sample.

Sponsorship models

3. Four main types of sponsorship model are evident in the sample, as summarised below. The 'single institution' and 'multi-institution (non-MAT)' models are the most prevalent, accounting for 15 of the 20 HE providers.

Summary of Sponsorship Models		
Single institution	The HE provider sponsors one academy, UTC or free school, either as the sole sponsor or with co-sponsors.	10
Multi-institution (non-MAT)	The HE provider sponsors two or more academies, UTCs or free schools (or a combination thereof) but not as part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). Co-sponsors may also be involved.	5
Multi-Academy Trust	The HE provider sponsors two or more institutions in a MAT. Co-sponsors may also be involved.	3
MAT+	The HE provider either has a) a sponsorship role in two MATs, or b) sponsors schools in a MAT and other schools that are not in a MAT.	2

Source: York Consulting

4. Three quarters of the HE providers (15) work with co-sponsors, including multi-national blue chip companies and large public sector employers.
5. In the large majority of cases (17), the sponsorship arrangements are either well established (i.e. have reached a steady state) or are maturing (i.e. some roles and responsibilities are subject to change or finalisation). For two providers, the sponsorship arrangements are still at a relatively early stage. Two providers have withdrawn from their sponsorship or were in the process of withdrawing at the time of the research².

¹ When referring to academies, UTCs and free schools collectively in this report, the term 'school' is used.

² These figures sum to 21 as one provider involved in two MATs reports that the relationship with each is at a different stage.

Motivations for becoming a sponsor

6. A range of factors have influenced HE providers' decisions to become involved in school sponsorship. The most prevalent include:
 - **Performance related reasons:** e.g. to address institutional underperformance, raise attainment and support learners to achieve their potential;
 - **Industry/sector related reasons:** e.g. to meet local employer need or to promote specific subjects, sectors or approaches to learning;
 - **Community and regeneration related reasons:** e.g. to improve the social capital of a local area.
7. It is relatively rare for HE providers to have become involved because they felt the sponsorship would deliver tangible benefits for their own organisation, or at least to cite any such reasons amongst their primary motivations.

Responsibility for sponsorships in HE providers

8. Overall responsibility for the sponsorship within HE providers typically rests with Pro-Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors or other members of staff holding senior posts. It is these individuals who most commonly sit on the boards of governors or trustees at the sponsored schools.
9. A range of other functions and departments are also involved. These include estates teams (especially where new builds or upgrades have taken place), outreach and enrolment teams, students (including trainee teachers), marketing teams and finance officers.

The role of HE providers in school sponsorship

10. Through the sponsorships, HE providers have made an important contribution across an array of strategic and operational areas. These include:
 - **Creating new schools or converting existing schools:** 19 HE providers have been involved in the creation of new UTCs, academies or free schools, or in the conversion of existing schools to academies. Their specific contributions have included bid writing, project management, marketing and promotion.
 - **Governance, management and advice:** all of the HE providers have, or have had, a place on the board of governors or trustees at the school(s) they sponsor. In seven cases, a representative from the HE provider chairs the board. The HE providers have also helped to establish finance and payroll systems, have undertaken health and safety assessments and financial reviews and have provided advice on human resources (HR) matters.
 - **Curriculum design and development:** Just under half (9) HE providers have been involved in the design and development of the curriculum in the school(s) they sponsor. This has included taking a 'curriculum director' role, bringing in

colleagues to provide specialist input and co-ordinating and co-designing industry projects.

- **Resource sharing:** 11 of the 20 HE providers have shared corporate resources, or plan to in the future, with the school(s) they sponsor. These include finance, payroll and HR systems, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) resources and communications and public relations resources. Other examples include staff and learners at the sponsored schools having access to university libraries, laboratories and sports facilities. Resource sharing occurs most commonly where HE providers and their sponsored schools are co-located, or are situated very close to each other.
- **Learner experience and enrichment:** almost without exception, HE providers are able to provide examples of wraparound support and enrichment activities taking place through the sponsorships. These include information, advice and guidance sessions delivered by HE provider staff, outreach activities, campus visits, student buddying systems and advice on HE pathways.
- **Teacher training opportunities:** in a small number of the HE providers (5), the sponsor relationship has provided the opportunity for undergraduates to access placement, training and volunteering opportunities in the sponsored schools.

Benefits to the school

11. Where the sponsorships have involved new builds or upgrades, HE providers unanimously agree that the learning environments are more modern and stimulating than those they have replaced. They are believed to be fostering a greater interest in learning, helping to attract high quality teaching staff and improving the motivation and morale of staff teams.
12. HE providers are similarly positive about the effects of the enrichment activities (see above) and, in particular, the positive impact on learners' enthusiasm for learning and their aspirations, especially with regard to HE.
13. Improved governance is also amongst the foremost benefits of sponsorship. There is now widespread agreement that the arrangements in place at the sponsored schools are largely fit for purpose. Specific benefits include stronger strategic leadership and better financial control than had been evident in the past.
14. Just under half (9) of the HE providers report improvements in educational attainment at the schools they sponsor. This is most common in schools that have been sponsored for the longest periods of time. The general view is that all of the sponsored schools will, over time, show improvements in attainment and will perform better against key metrics of academic performance than the institutions they have replaced.
15. It is a similar picture on learner progression. Seven of the 20 HE providers report an increase in the proportion of learners applying to university, or showing an interest in doing so, since the sponsorship began, and several others expect this to occur over the years ahead.

16. Being able to access high quality facilities such as laboratories, libraries and sports equipment has been of obvious benefit to the sponsored schools and their learners. It has also helped the schools to save costs, as has accessing external services already used by the HE provider such as security, cleaning and facilities management.

Benefits to HE providers

17. All but one of the HE providers can identify at least one benefit that has occurred for their own institution as a result of the sponsorship. These include:
- **Reputation and profile:** 12 providers report that their own reputation and/or profile has been strengthened as a result of the sponsorship. For some, it has provided exposure to local communities whose engagement with HE is typically limited.
 - **Student and staff opportunities:** the opportunities to undertake teacher training placements, to participate in buddying and mentoring schemes and to support teachers in the sponsored schools has benefited staff and/or students in 9 of the HE providers.
 - **Understanding the school sector:** Just over a third (7) of the HE providers report that they have deepened their knowledge of school curriculums, school governance and finance, and/or have a better appreciation of the constraints within which schools operate as a result of the sponsorship.

Monitoring and evaluation

18. Whilst a great deal of monitoring takes place at the sponsored institutions – e.g. on attainment, university applications and progression to HE – nowhere across the sample are the specific effects of the sponsorship being tracked or recorded. The main reason for this is the challenge of separating the effects, or proportion of a given outcome, that can be attributed to an HE provider’s sponsorship from the influence of other factors.

Challenges: early stage

19. Almost without exception, the HE providers have found the time demands of their sponsorship, especially in the early stages, to be greater than they had expected. Various factors have contributed to this, including the time it has taken to co-ordinate the different parties involved, the need to develop a deeper knowledge of the school sector and the work involved in recruiting governors, project managing new builds and establishing new employment contracts.
20. Over half of the HE providers (11) also reported that they have had to win over hearts and minds, especially amongst local parents. For UTCs in particular, it has proven challenging to recruit learners (and, as a precursor to that, to convince parents) when the institution does not physically exist. In response, HE providers and their co-sponsors have organised local consultation events and have sought to engage head teachers at local schools that could act as feeders.

21. Recruitment challenges also extend to staff posts. Five of the 20 HE providers reported that their sponsored institution(s) had found it challenging to fill vacancies, especially where new builds are incomplete or where predecessor schools had not performed well.

Challenges: ongoing

22. For most HE providers in the sample, the challenges associated with school sponsorship have become less significant over time. However, some do persist:
- **Time commitment:** even when a sponsorship is in a steady state, the demands it places on HE providers' time are not to be underestimated. The workload associated with governor/trustee business and meetings, together with the various projects and activities for which an HE sponsor may be responsible, are key contributory factors.
 - **Justifying the investment:** some of the HE sponsors have been asked questions by colleagues about the resources being committed to the sponsorship vis-à-vis the benefits that will be generated for the HE provider. In response, the sponsors have circulated reports which demonstrate improvements in attainment and increases in HE progression at the sponsored schools.
 - **Managing risk:** the most significant risk facing the HE providers is that of reputational damage should the school(s) they are sponsoring perform poorly at inspection and/or against key attainment metrics. There are also risks associated with under-subscription and over-subscription of learners, although most providers are confident that these risks are being managed effectively.

Lessons learned and tips

23. Explained in full in Chapter 6 of the main report, the key sponsorship related lessons identified by the HE providers centre on having clarity of purpose, being clear on roles and responsibilities, recognising the required time commitments, engaging and establishing relationships with key stakeholders and having sound knowledge of the school sector.
24. There is a close fit between these lessons and HE providers' 'top tips'. Also explained in Chapter 6, these cover ambition and purpose, the importance of location, managing dialogue with partners, effective planning, recognising the need for support and advice, and monitoring and reporting.

1 BACKGROUND

Introduction

- 1.1 This is the final report from a qualitative research study exploring the experiences of Higher Education (HE) providers involved in the establishment, development and sponsorship of academies, University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and free schools³.
- 1.2 The report provides a thematic assessment of findings from 20 qualitative case studies undertaken with HE providers across England that are engaged in sponsorship arrangements. The report is accompanied by individual case study reports, each of which has been approved by the HE provider in question.
- 1.3 This research study was commissioned and funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). It took place between December 2015 and March 2016.

Context and Approach

- 1.4 Over the last decade, increasing numbers of HE providers have become involved in sponsorship arrangements with schools, either as the main sponsor or as a co-sponsor. Initially these relationships were with academies, but more recently have included UTCs and free schools.
- 1.5 Research undertaken by HEFCE has highlighted the significant contributions being made by HE providers through the sponsorships. It has also shed some light, albeit at a relatively early stage, on the benefits that sponsorship can generate for the schools being sponsored, the HE providers and their local communities⁴. In December 2015, HEFCE commissioned a series of qualitative case studies and a report of key themes (this report) to provide further insight into the sponsorship arrangements and to help inform the development of practical guidance for prospective HE sponsors.
- 1.6 The key lines of enquiry explored through the study are shown in Table 1.1.

³ When referring to academies, UTCs and free schools collectively in this report, the term 'school' is used.

⁴ HEFCE (2015). Working with schools: Universities sponsoring academies, UTCs and free schools.

Table 1.1: Key Lines of Enquiry

Background:

- Nature, scale and scope of the relationships between HE providers and the sponsored institutions.
- Reasons and motivations underpinning the development of the sponsorship.
- Challenges that have arisen and how these have been addressed.
- The resources required to set up and maintain the sponsorship arrangements.

Outcomes:

- Benefits of the sponsorship to the HE providers, the sponsored institutions (including its staff and learners) and the wider community.
- How the impacts of the sponsorship relationship are monitored and evaluated.

Lessons learned:

- Advice for other HE providers considering sponsorship relationships with schools.

- 1.7 The study has been delivered through semi-structured, face-to-face and telephone consultations with staff at 20 HE providers that sponsor one or more schools. Sampling was based on a self-selecting approach and each of the providers indicated to HEFCE their willingness to take part in the study before being approached by the researchers.
- 1.8 The geographic spread of the HE providers in the sample is shown in Figure 1.1. The red diamonds in the figure represent the HE providers.

Figure 1.1: Location of the study sample



Source: York Consulting

The sample of HE providers is broadly representative of HE providers nationally in terms of tariff⁵ and size, although the sample has a slight over-representation of lower tariff institutions and a slight under-representation of very small institutions. Six of the nine English regions are represented in the sample.

Acknowledgements

- 1.9 Thanks are owed to the representatives from the 20 HE providers that have taken part in this research, all of whom were very generous with their time.

Glossary of Terms

Academies: State funded schools in [England](#) which are directly funded by the [Department for Education](#) (DfE) and are independent of [local authority](#) control. In terms of volume, there are more primary school academies than secondary school academies. However, in terms of proportion, a higher percentage of secondary schools have become academies compared to the percentage of the total number of primary schools that have become academies. Academies are self-governing [non-profit charitable trusts](#) and may receive additional support from personal or corporate sponsors, either financially or in kind. Academies do not have to follow the [national curriculum](#) but are required to offer a broad and balanced curriculum. They have to follow the same rules on [admissions](#), [special educational needs](#) and [exclusions](#) as other state schools and are subject to inspection by Ofsted.

Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs): In a Multi-Academy Trust, a single trust is responsible for a number of academies. The MAT consists of the members and the trustees.

Free schools: New academies established since 2011 via the Free School Programme.

University Technical Colleges (UTCs): Free schools for the 14-18 age group, specialising in practical, employment focused subjects and sponsored by a university, employer or Further Education college.

All-through schools: Schools providing primary and secondary education. In the United Kingdom, all-through schools accept children at age 4 and school them through to sixth-form (age 18-19).

HEFCE: A [non-departmental public body](#) of the [DfE](#), which has been responsible for the distribution of funding to universities and [colleges of Higher and Further Education](#) in England since 1992.

⁵ The sample included three HE providers with high average tariff scores, four with medium average tariff scores and eight with low average tariff scores. The sample also included four specialist HE providers and one Further Education college that also offers HE provision.

2 SPONSORSHIP MODELS

Introduction

- 2.1 This chapter explains the different types and stages of maturity of the sponsorship arrangements that are in place across the research sample. The reasons that prompted the HE providers to become involved in the sponsorship of a school(s) are also explored.

Sponsorship Models

- 2.2 The models that have been established between the HE providers and the schools they sponsor vary significantly. Whereas in some cases the arrangement focuses on a single institution and/or has a relatively narrow focus, in others the HE providers have assumed central roles in the establishment and development of complex MATs.
- 2.3 The accompanying case studies, excerpts from which are included throughout this report, provide details of the sponsorship models employed by each of the HE providers. In broad terms these can be grouped into four main types of model, which are summarised in Table 2.1. The ‘single institution’ and ‘multi-institution (non-MAT)’ models are the most prevalent, accounting for 15 of the 20 HE providers.

Table 2.1: Summary of Sponsorship Models

Single institution	The HE provider sponsors one academy, UTC or free school, either as the sole sponsor or with co-sponsors.	10
Multi-institution (non-MAT)	The HE provider sponsors two or more academies, UTCs or free schools (or a combination thereof) but not as part of a MAT. Co-sponsors may also be involved.	5
Multi-Academy Trust	The HE provider sponsors two or more institutions in a MAT. Co-sponsors may also be involved.	3
MAT+	The HE provider either has a) a sponsorship role in two MATs or b) sponsors schools in a MAT and other schools that are not in a MAT.	2

Source: York Consulting

- 2.4 Three quarters (15) of the HE providers work with co-sponsors. Most commonly these are employers and include an array of multi-national blue chip companies and large public sector employers. Other types of co-sponsor include:

- Employers’ organisations and consortia;
- Other educational partners (e.g. Further Education colleges and HE providers);
- Local authorities;

- Not-for-profit organisations.
- 2.5 Across the 20 providers in the sample, 10 are the nominated lead sponsor. The other 10 have a co-sponsor role.

Sponsorship Models: Case Study Examples

- 2.6 The boxes on the following page provide a summary example of each of the four main sponsorship models.

Example of a Single Institution Model

In 2008, a university in the North of England became a co-sponsor of a new academy which was created following the merger and subsequent closure of two local schools, both of which had faced significant challenges. The other two co-sponsors of the academy are large employers and recognised leaders in their industry. The overall purpose of the sponsorship is to support the education and development of young people and to contribute to the social capital of the local area.

The university is the educational sponsor of the academy. Its role includes being a member of the board of governors; chairing, vice-chairing and/or attending several of the academy's committees; and providing HE-specific support such as campus visits for academy learners and giving presentations on HE pathways.

Example of a Multi-Academy Trust Model

The MAT, in the Midlands, was established in 2013 by recruiting an existing academy and two local primary schools. At the time of writing the MAT was in the process of recruiting an additional two schools. The university had previously (i.e. prior to the MAT) sponsored the academy. It subsequently had a key role in establishing and supporting the development of the MAT and cites a strong alignment between the academy programme and the university's commitment to widening participation as a key reason for being involved.

The university has supported the development of MAT policies including (but not limited to) admissions, social media, human resources, finance and health and safety. The university has also inputted into the recruitment of the MAT's Chief Executive Officer, nominated staff to sit on the board of trustees and has acted as an educational improvement partner for the MAT.

Example of a Multi-Institution (non-MAT) Model

A university in the Midlands is a co-sponsor of two UTCs, both with specialisms in engineering. The rationale for the university's involvement was to "help make this county the best place for young people to study".

The university has been centrally involved in all stages of the development of both UTCs. In addition to contributing to the original bids, they have provided a project management function from within their estates team, nominated a member of staff to act as the Curriculum Director across both UTCs, brought industrial partners on board, facilitated work placement programmes and recruited a marketing team to develop prospectuses and other promotional materials. They have also taken part in recruitment events, chaired the board of one of the UTCs and provided temporary accommodation for UTC learners whilst building works were being completed.

Example of a MAT+ Model

A university in the South of England has a sponsorship role in two MATs, one involving co-sponsorship and one without any co-sponsors (referred to here as MAT-A and MAT-B).

MAT-A has overseen the redevelopment of three secondary schools, has supported an additional three previously underperforming secondary schools and now also includes seven primary schools. It has a geographic footprint covering an area with low educational performance and high deprivation. The university has been involved with this MAT since 2009.

MAT-B features four primary schools, with a secondary school soon to join. MAT-B was created in 2015 because of the growing number of schools outside of the geographic footprint of MAT-A that wanted to join.

The main motivation behind the university's participation in the MATs was to raise the aspirations and achievements of young people. They are keen to convince local people that "university is possible".

Maturity of the Sponsorship Arrangements

- 2.7 Across the sample, the length of time that the sponsorships have been in place ranges from two to ten years. As a consequence, the maturity of the arrangements and relationships varies, from those that are still in the relatively early stages to those that are much more embedded.
- 2.8 Table 2.2 shows the different categories into which the HE providers' sponsorship arrangements can best be placed. It shows that for over half of the sample (11), the arrangements are 'established' (in each case the HE provider has been involved for at least four years) and for a further six providers the arrangements are 'maturing'. In our sample, 'New/emerging' sponsorship arrangements are rare by comparison and only apply to two of the HE providers. Two providers have withdrawn from sponsorship, or at the time of writing were in the process of withdrawing, the reasons for which are covered at the end of this chapter.
- 2.9 Categorising the maturity of the sponsorship arrangements is not an exact science. In reality, some straddle more than one category, while others have changed category and no doubt will again as time progresses. Table 2.2 therefore provides a best-fit picture at the time that the consultations were undertaken.

New/emerging	The sponsorship is at an early stage, e.g. the sponsored institution is yet to open or the HE provider has been involved for less than a year.	2
Maturing	The sponsorship arrangements may be subject to change or roles and responsibilities may not yet be finalised. The sponsored institution is open but may not have reached full capacity.	6
Established	The sponsorship arrangements are in a steady state. Roles and responsibilities are well defined and understood across the key partners involved.	11
Withdrawing/withdrawn	The HE provider is no longer involved in the sponsorship or is in the process of withdrawing.	2
Source: York Consulting. The number of HE providers sums to more than 20 as one provider involved in two MATs reports that the relationship with each is at a different stage.		

- 2.10 Figure 2.1 on the following page plots the HE providers in the sample according to their sponsorship model and stage(s) of maturity (each blue circle represents an HE provider). The main concentration is in the shaded cells, where 'single institution' and 'multi-institution (non-MAT)' models that are maturing or established account for more than half of the total sample.

Figure 2.1: Sponsorship models and maturity

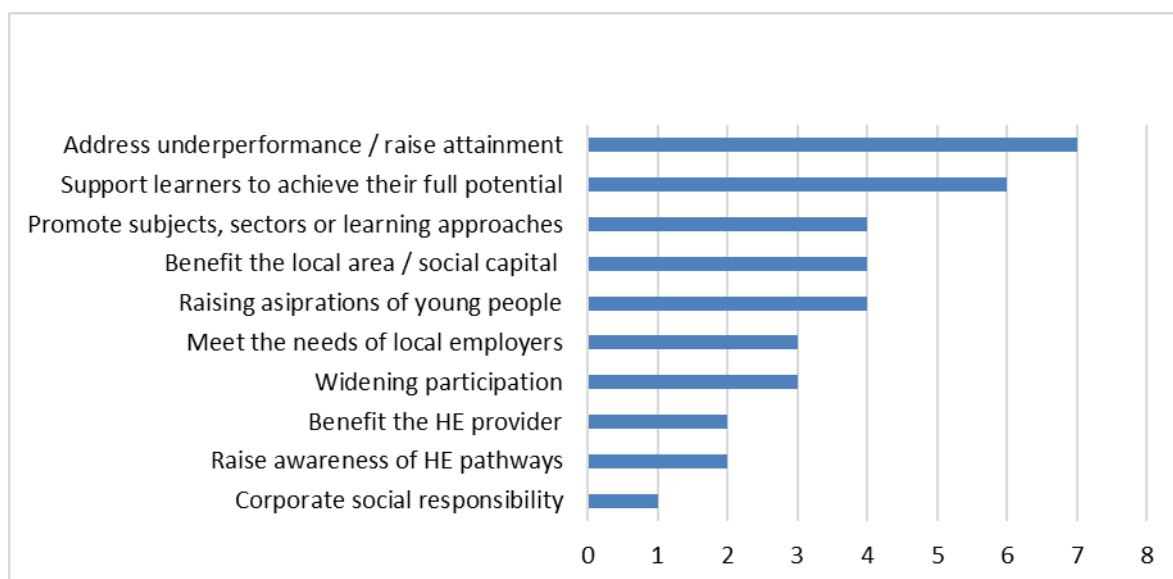
	MAT+	MAT	Multi-institution (non-MAT)	Single Institution
New/emerging				● ●
Maturing		●	● ●	● ● ●
Established	● ●	● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ●
Withdrawing/ Withdrawn				● ●

Source: York Consulting

Motivations for Becoming a Sponsor

- 2.11 The HE providers in the sample identified a range of reasons that had influenced their decision to sponsor one or more schools. These included:
- **Performance related reasons:** e.g. addressing institutional underperformance, raising attainment and supporting learners to achieve their potential;
 - **Industry/sector related reasons:** e.g. meeting local employer need and promoting specific subjects, sectors or approaches to learning;
 - **Community and regeneration related reasons:** e.g. improving the social capital of a local area.
- 2.12 Figure 2.2 shows all of the reasons cited by the HE providers. None of these dominates, although addressing educational and institutional underperformance and supporting learners to achieve their full potential were cited by the largest number of providers (7 and 6 respectively). It is relatively rare for HE providers to say that they had become involved because the sponsorship would deliver tangible benefits for their own organisation, or at least to cite that amongst their primary motivations. One provider saw it as an opportunity to strengthen their presence in the local area, whilst another said it gave them the opportunity to address Ofsted feedback, but they were very much the exceptions.
- 2.13 Note also that there is a degree of overlap across the categories in the chart. For example, ‘supporting learners to achieve their full potential’ could well be implied within ‘addressing underperformance/raising attainment’. However, in the interests of avoiding subjective judgements, it is only those motivations that were explicitly cited by the HE providers that have been reported.

Figure 2.2: Motivations for becoming a sponsor



Source: York Consulting

Motivations for Becoming a Sponsor: Case Study Examples

Performance related reasons

A university in the East of England became a sponsor because of what it describes as “an educational mission” to ensure that everyone who is capable of performing well, at whatever stage of learning, has the opportunity to do so. The university also wants to raise aspirations in an area where educational achievement and progression to HE is typically low.

A university in the North of England chose to become a co-sponsor in the formation of a new academy because they wanted to support the education and development of young people in the local area and saw it as an opportunity to ‘normalise’ higher education.

“This isn’t about getting learners to come to our university. It’s about getting young people at the academy interested in HE generally and persuading them that it isn’t just something for ‘other people’.” Academic Director

A university in the South West of England cites its primary motivation for becoming involved in a MAT as “school improvement”. The MAT was created as a result of two local schools facing the prospect of Special Measures. Initially there was a ‘soft federation’ arrangement (where the schools collaborated to improve student outcomes) which subsequently became a MAT and now comprises 14 schools.

Industry/sector related reasons

A university in the South East of England became a sponsor in order to help develop a UTC that could equip young people with the engineering and technical skills in demand from local employers. Senior figures from blue chip companies (including those that are normally in competition with one another) have worked together to provide an enriching learning experience that reflects the fast paced, innovative nature of the engineering industry.

An HE provider in the North of England established a new free school (and in 2016 is opening a new sixth form) to offer young people the opportunity to develop and maintain a love of learning through performing arts.

A university in the South East of England became a co-sponsor of a new UTC in order to introduce technically based education provision that was well aligned with the employment opportunities offered by major infrastructure programmes in the local area.

Community and regeneration related reasons

For an HE provider in the South West of England, the primary motivation for entering into a sponsorship agreement with a new school was to help deliver social and educational change in the local area. The sponsorship has been underpinned by a vision of a progressive continuum of learning, from early years to post-compulsory education.

A university in the South of England has a strong regional mission and a corporate focus on its locality. It formed a MAT to “do something profound for the future of our communities” and to transform teaching and learning for the mutual benefit of learners, staff and the local area.

Withdrawing from a Sponsorship Arrangement

- 2.14 Across the sample of HE providers, one has withdrawn completely from sponsoring an academy and one was in the process of withdrawing from a MAT when the research was undertaken. The reasons for their withdrawal differed:
- **Withdrawal from academy sponsorship:** the university has not been able to commit the time required to deliver change on the scale needed at the academy. New sponsors have since taken over.
 - **Withdrawing from a MAT:** a change in institutional priorities at the university has placed a limit on the resource that can be committed to the sponsorship going forwards.
- 2.15 At the time of the research, the other HE providers in the sample remained committed to their sponsorships.

3 WHAT DOES SPONSORSHIP INVOLVE FOR HE PROVIDERS?

Introduction

- 3.1 There is significant variation across the study sample in terms of the roles and responsibilities fulfilled by HE providers via their sponsorship arrangements. The key message is that whilst there are some common themes (e.g. all have had a governance related role), there are no well-defined models or typologies. This reflects the fact that each sponsored institution is unique in its needs and circumstances and also that the HE sponsors are themselves a heterogeneous group.
- 3.2 This chapter looks first at whom within the HE providers is responsible for the sponsorships and then considers the time inputs they are making. Each of the main types of role/responsibility is then covered, including an indication of its prevalence across the sample.

Responsibility for Sponsorships in HE Providers

- 3.3 Overall responsibility for the sponsorships within HE providers typically rests with Pro-Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors or other members of staff holding senior posts. It is these individuals who most commonly sit on the board of governors or trustees at the sponsored schools and whom, as a result, have an important role in strategic decision making.
- 3.4 A range of other functions and departments from within the HE providers have also been involved in the sponsorships. These include, although are not limited to:
- Estates teams, especially where new facilities have been built or upgrades have taken place;
 - Outreach and enrolment teams;
 - Students, including trainee teachers;
 - Marketing teams, e.g. to help develop prospectuses and other marketing materials;
 - Finance officers.

A university in the East of England appointed a project manager from their estates team to oversee the design and build of a new UTC. The role included the appointment of a lead contractor for the new build, attending site meetings and monitoring progress, defect testing, recruiting maintenance staff and helping to establish public transport routes to the UTC.

A university in the South East of England has made staff available to provide careers advice and information on HE pathways to all schools involved in a MAT. They have also hosted HE progression events at the university and within the schools.

Time Commitment

- 3.5 Accurately quantifying or comparing the amount of time that HE providers commit to the sponsorships is difficult. Whilst some have been able to provide estimates (for example, one said it was 15 days per year whilst another suggested it was nearer 50), the following reasons dictate that the calculation of a composite average is hard to achieve in a way that is meaningful:
- The nature and scale of the HE providers' inputs varies significantly depending on the type of institution(s) they are sponsoring, the objectives of the sponsorship, and the roles and responsibilities of key partners.
 - There are peaks and troughs in sponsorship activity. Some HE providers were, at the time of the research, heavily involved in new builds, curriculum design or multi-partner drives to improve Ofsted ratings, all of which were consuming considerable resource. Others had reached a 'business as usual' position.
 - The sponsored schools differ considerably in terms of their needs, aspirations and their local demographics. This is reflected in both the type and amount of input required from the HE sponsors.
- 3.6 What can be said, however, is that HE providers have consistently underestimated the amount of time they would need to commit to the sponsorship. They have not shirked from this – on the contrary, considerable out-of-hours contributions are commonplace – but it is nonetheless an important lesson and one that is revisited in Chapter 6 ('Lessons Learned and Tips').

Roles and Responsibilities of HE Sponsors

Creating new schools or converting existing schools

- 3.7 All bar one of the 20 HE providers in the sample have been involved in the creation of new UTCs, academies or free schools, or in the conversion of existing schools to academies. This breaks down as follows (note that these numbers sum to 23 as 4 of the HE providers appear in more than one category):
- 8 HE providers have contributed to the creation of a new UTC;
 - 7 HE providers have been involved in the creation of a new academy or free school, i.e. a new build;
 - 8 HE providers have been involved in the conversion of one or more existing schools to academies or trust schools.
- 3.8 The roles of the HE providers in the establishment of new and converted schools have been influenced by whether or not they are the lead sponsor, the strengths and specialisms of other sponsors (where present) and how well developed the plans were when they became involved. Their roles have included:
- **Bid writing:** contributing to or lead-writing bids for new schools or, in a small number of cases, for the set-up of MATs;

- **Design and build:** inputting into the design of new buildings, selecting lead contractors and maintenance staff, and providing temporary teaching accommodation whilst building works are completed;
- **Management and oversight:** providing project management resource and managing the relationship with the DfE during the start-up phase;
- **Marketing and promotion:** developing (and helping to develop) websites, prospectuses and other promotional materials for the new schools.

A university in the South of England has been heavily involved in the creation of a new UTC specialising in aviation engineering. The university contributed to the original bid for the UTC, provided members of staff to help design and supervise the new build and has been the lead contact for the DfE. They have also provided temporary teaching space for UTC learners.

A university in the Midlands has made significant in-kind contributions to the development of two new UTCs. These contributions have included staff time (through zero-cost secondments), project management, marketing, communications, IT, procurement, administration, finance and HR.

Governance, management and advice

- 3.9 All 20 of the HE providers have, or have had, a place on the board of governors or trustees at the school(s) they sponsor. In seven cases, a representative from the HE provider chairs the board.
- 3.10 In addition, the HE providers contribute to many other aspects of the management of the sponsored institutions by attending and/or chairing a range of committees such as finance, personnel, estates and health and safety, amongst others.

A university in the North of England is the co-sponsor of an academy which opened in 2008. The sponsorship role is undertaken by one member of staff at the university who, from a governance and management perspective, does the following:

- Sits on the board of governors;
- Vice chairs the Performance and Quality Committee;
- Sits on the Premises, Health and Safety, Student Behaviour and Welfare, and Finance and General Purposes Committees.

The above equates to approximately 20 days of formal input per academic year.

A university in the South of England has contributed to the establishment and ongoing governance of a new academy by:

- Appointing 8 of the academy's 15 governors;
- Chairing the board of governors;
- Establishing the Student Wellbeing, Educational Standards and Finance, Personnel and Estates Committees;
- Chairing the Finance, Personnel and Estates Committee.

- 3.11 In addition to their formal, committee-based roles, the HE providers have also contributed to governance and management in a range of other ways. These include establishing finance and payroll systems, undertaking health and safety assessments and financial reviews, and providing advice on HR matters.

Secretarial support for meetings of the MAT board, together with administrative functions such as Companies House returns, are provided by a university in the East of England that sponsors two schools in a MAT. One of the university's senior finance managers also acts as the Chief Financial Officer of the MAT.

Curriculum design and development

- 3.12 Just under half (9) of the HE providers have contributed to the development of the curriculums in the schools that they sponsor. This has included:
- Taking a 'curriculum director' role and having overall responsibility for the implementation of a high quality curriculum;
 - Drawing on the skills and knowledge of colleagues from within the HE provider to inform curriculum design;
 - Coordinating and co-designing employer-led projects;
 - Bringing industrial partners together and facilitating programmes of work placements.

A UTC in the South of England has adopted a project-led curriculum model to deliver parts of its specialised curriculum. This comprises sponsor-led projects that link core subjects with additional, employer-relevant knowledge and skills.

- 3.13 Although not curriculum development per se, there are also examples of strong links between the curriculum offered by sponsored schools and the specialisms of their HE sponsor. For example, the Schools of Education (or equivalent) at six HE providers have supported the teaching of various subjects, including mathematics and phonics, in their sponsored schools. There are also examples of buddy systems between university and school staff.

Resource sharing

- 3.14 More than half (11) of the HE providers have shared corporate resources, or plan to in the future, with the school(s) they are sponsoring. The resources shared include finance, payroll and HR systems, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) resources, and communications and public relations resources. Other examples include staff and learners at sponsored schools having access to university libraries, laboratories and sports facilities.
- 3.15 Where HE providers and their sponsored schools are co-located, or are situated very close to each other, there appear to be more opportunities for the sharing of resources and, particularly, for the co-use of services such as security, cleaning and catering.

In the North West of England, two free schools (one primary, one secondary) are sponsored by an HE provider. Both of the free schools are able to make use of the HE provider's finance, HR, security and facilities management teams. These are charged to the schools at cost.

- 3.16 In addition to formally sharing resources, many of the sponsored schools are also able to seek assistance and advice from their HE sponsors on a range of strategic and operational matters. They do this both through the various committees and boards on which the HE sponsors sit and via ad hoc requests.

A university in the South of England has shared CPD resources with the UTC that it sponsors. It has also responded to ad hoc queries about a forthcoming financial audit of the UTC.

Learner experience and enrichment

- 3.17 Almost without exception, the HE providers in the sample highlighted one or more ways in which the learning experiences and wraparound support available to learners in the sponsored schools have been enhanced through the sponsorship. These include HE providers:

- Offering information, advice and guidance (IAG) to learners in the sponsored schools on careers opportunities and HE pathways;
- Undertaking outreach activities and/or arranging for learners at the sponsored institutions to visit their facility/campus;
- Establishing mentoring or buddying arrangements between undergraduates at the HE provider and learners at the sponsored schools.

Learners at a UTC in the North West of England have received careers information, advice and guidance from staff at the HE sponsor. This has included presentations on apprenticeships and alternative routes through HE, talks on student finance and support with UCAS applications.

In the South of England, a new UTC is due to open in September 2016. The intention is that undergraduates from the HE sponsor will act as mentors/buddies to the UTC learners and that student ambassadors from the HE sponsor will provide UTC learners with an insight into university life.

A university in the North of England provides a range of enrichment opportunities for learners at the two academies it sponsors. For example, the university's Fine Arts faculty has delivered projects within the academies, while the School of Journalism works with the secondary academy to produce a school newspaper. Learners from the secondary academy have also visited the university campus.

Teacher training opportunities

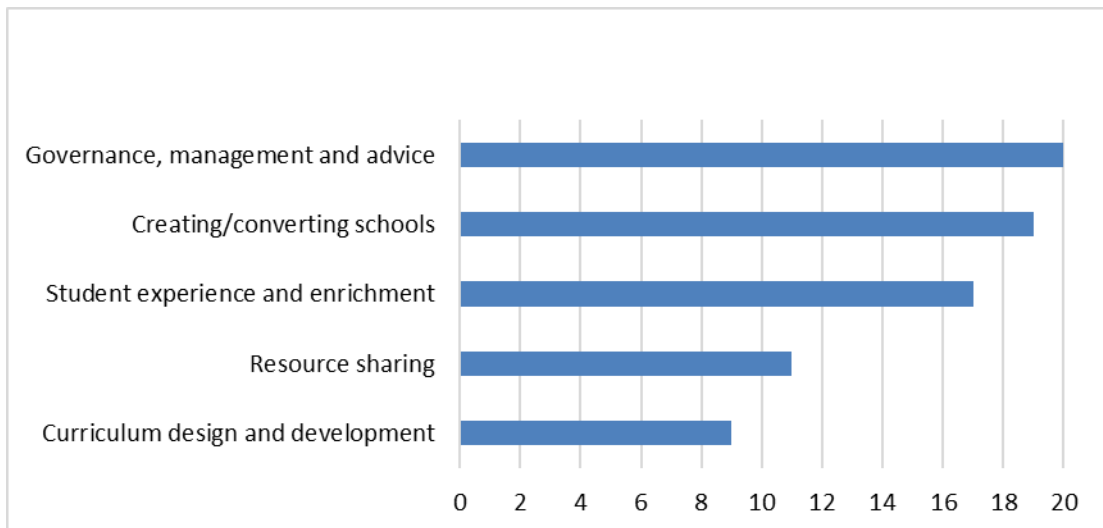
- 3.18 For a quarter of the HE providers (5), the sponsor relationship has provided the opportunity for undergraduates to access placement, training and volunteering opportunities in the sponsored schools.

In the Midlands, a MAT is sponsored by an HE provider with significant initial teacher training provision. Via the sponsorship, the HE provider has been able to arrange placements for a proportion of its trainee teachers at the schools in the MAT. Given the increasingly school-based nature of initial teacher training provision, this is seen to have been a very beneficial aspect of the sponsorship.

Roles and Responsibilities in Summary

- 3.19 Figure 3.1 summarises the types of roles and responsibilities undertaken by HE providers through their sponsorships and the number of HE providers to which each type applies.

Figure 3.1: Roles and responsibilities in summary



Source: York Consulting

4 BENEFITS OF SPONSORSHIP

Introduction

- 4.1 A clear message to emerge from this research is that a large majority of the HE providers in the sample believe that the benefits of school sponsorship outweigh the challenges. There are isolated examples where this is not the case, but in the main, the overall sponsorship experience has been positive.
- 4.2 This chapter outlines the main benefits of school sponsorship as reported by HE providers. The benefits have been separated into three categories: school sector benefits, HE provider benefits and benefits for the wider community. It also considers the extent to which the outcomes and impacts of school sponsorship are being monitored and evaluated.

Benefits to the Schools

Facilities and environments

- 4.3 Through the sponsorship arrangements, more than three quarters (16) of the 20 HE providers have had a role in the design and/or build of a new UTC, academy or free school, or in the refurbishment/upgrade of existing learning facilities.
- 4.4 The unanimous view across these HE providers is that the new schools and facilities provide learning environments that are much more modern and stimulating, both for learners and teaching staff, than those they have replaced. The HE providers regularly spoke of the new facilities being “leading edge” and “top class” and there is an evident pride in having been part in their creation (as documented in Chapter 3, some HE providers had an integral role in the design and project management of new builds).
- 4.5 Whilst none of the HE providers claims that the new facilities have, in isolation, been responsible for improvements in attainment and performance, there is nonetheless widespread agreement that they have played an important part by:
- Providing learners with access to modern, industry-relevant facilities that help to stimulate an interest in, and an appetite for, learning;
 - Helping to attract enthusiastic, high quality teaching staff;
 - Improving the motivation and morale of the staff team.

At a new UTC in the South East of England, learners have access to modern, specialist equipment for taking physiological measurements and measuring physical performance. Learners have also designed a prototype bio-sensor to measure sweat which was exhibited at a World Skills event.

- 4.6 The co-location of new schools and HE providers has delivered similar benefits, for example where staff and learners at the schools have been able to access the HE providers’ laboratories, sports facilities and libraries.

Enrichment and industry exposure

- 4.7 Reported under ‘Learner Experience and Enrichment’ in Chapter 3, there are numerous ways in which the sponsorships have given learners exposure to activities and support beyond the core curriculum. These have included industry-led projects, careers and HE guidance sessions, campus visits and mentoring/buddying arrangements.
- 4.8 There is unanimous agreement across the HE providers that these activities and experiences represent a key benefit of the sponsorships and have had a positive impact upon:
- Learners’ (and parents’) understanding and consideration of different post-compulsory education options;
 - Learners’ aspirations, especially with regard to HE. Many of the HE providers sponsor schools in areas where progression to HE has historically been low;
 - Learners’ engagement in, and enthusiasm for, learning. Several examples were cited of learners seeming much more engaged in learning as a result (in full or in part) of the enrichment activities made possible through the sponsorship.

Learners at a UTC in the Midlands have exposure to a network of local employers. This is reported to help the learners develop strong employability skills and make well informed choices about their further and higher education options and career pathways.

At a school that is part of a MAT in London, the outreach work undertaken by the HE sponsor (which has included IAG, mentoring and other enrichment activities) is reported to have had a positive effect on learners’ aspirations and, in some cases, has fundamentally changed the way they view HE.

An initiative led by an HE sponsor in the Midlands has seen university undergraduates undertake paid work experience in the sponsored school. This is reported to have a positive role model effect and can be powerful in encouraging learners within the school to develop their own ambitions for HE.

Governance and leadership

- 4.9 Eight of the HE providers entered into a sponsorship when one or more existing schools were struggling or were seen to be failing. It is therefore reassuring that, with the exception of one HE provider that has withdrawn from sponsorship, there is widespread agreement that the current governance arrangements at the sponsored schools either represent a significant improvement on what was in place previously or, where new institutions have been created, are largely fit for purpose. Specific benefits have included:
- Stronger strategic leadership and clearer visions and mission statements;
 - Better financial planning and control;

- The appointment of high calibre, senior staff with the necessary skills and attributes to lead a new or merged school;
- The addressing of poor performance and improvements in inspection ratings.

At an academy in the North West of England that was created from the merger of two struggling schools, staff attrition was initially high. Whilst this was deemed necessary by the governors (including the sponsors) in order to secure a staff team with the right skills and attributes, it also required regular and wide-ranging input from the governors. In 2010, the governors appointed a Principal whose contribution to stabilising the staff team and driving up performance has subsequently been described as “transformational”.

At two schools that have been incorporated within a MAT, governor meetings are now much more focused on learner progress and the holistic development of learners than they had been in the past. The two Principals and senior teams are well supported by the governors and there is a view that all parties are working towards shared objectives.

- 4.10 Improved governance has clearly been amongst the foremost benefits of the sponsorships, but it is also important to note that it has not been without its challenges, nor, in many cases, has it been a quick fix. Indeed, there are numerous examples where roles and responsibilities could, with hindsight, have been better defined and where it has taken a number of years to reach a steady state. This is revisited in Chapter 5.
- 4.11 It is also of note that this section considers governance per se and not the specific contributions to governance that have been made by the HE sponsors. Disentangling one from the other is not straightforward: there are examples where HE providers have had very distinct roles on boards of governors and trustees, but in many cases they have also inputted into decisions (strategic and operational) across a wide range of other important areas. As such, rather than attempting to isolate the significance or impact of individual contributions, it is more appropriate to consider the effectiveness and influence of governance as a whole.

Attainment

- 4.12 Just under half (9) of the HE providers reported improvements in educational attainment at the schools they sponsor. Unsurprisingly, these improvements are most common amongst schools that have been sponsored for the longest periods of time. Examples include the following:
- In 2015, an academy in the North West achieved a 100% A Level pass rate, a 226 average point score per entry and a 987 average point score per learner. GCSE results have also improved over the academy’s life and, in 2015, 61% of Year 11 learners achieved five or more A*-C GCSEs including English and maths. This is significantly higher than the equivalent attainment rates in the two schools that the academy has replaced.

- At an academy in the South East, the proportion of learners achieving five or more GCSE A*-C grades including English and maths is now twice what it was in the two schools replaced by the academy.
 - At a school in a MAT in the East Midlands, 51% of learners achieved five or more A*-C GCSEs including English and maths in 2015. This is a considerable increase on the 38% recorded in 2012 and is accompanied by value added data which indicates that learners at the school are, overall, making greater progress than learners of a similar ability nationally.
- 4.13 In some of the sponsored schools it remains too early for demonstrable improvements in attainment to have occurred. In two cases, HE providers are sponsoring schools that have not yet opened. However, the general view is that all of the sponsored schools will, over time, show improvements in attainment and will perform better against key metrics of academic performance than the institutions they have replaced.
- 4.14 The issue then becomes one of attribution, i.e. the extent to which the improvements in attainment can be attributed to the sponsorship. In reality, this is difficult to assess with any precision given the array of other influencing factors. Nonetheless, there is compelling anecdotal feedback to suggest that the sponsorships have played a major part. Sponsors, including HE sponsors, have, in many cases, helped to set the strategic direction of the school(s), have been centrally involved in the appointment of key staff, have enabled teaching staff at the schools to develop new skills and have arranged a host of engaging experiences for learners. Whilst difficult to quantify, it seems almost inarguable that these inputs will not have contributed to the reported improvements in attainment.

Progression

- 4.15 It is a similar picture on learner progression. Seven of the 20 HE providers reported an increase in the proportion of learners at the sponsored schools applying to university, or showing an interest in doing so, since the sponsorship began. Several others expect to see an increase in the future. Specific examples include:
- An increase in the proportion of Year 11 learners applying to university, from 20% to 60%, at a school in a MAT;
 - Similarly encouraging increases at an academy that is co-sponsored by an HE provider and at another school that is part of a MAT;
 - Anecdotal evidence of learners at sponsored schools applying to university which, based on feedback from staff, would have been less likely in the past.
- 4.16 As with attainment, proving a direct link between the HE providers' involvement and the progression outcomes is challenging. However, the anecdotal feedback is once again compelling, especially given the work that the HE providers have undertaken on IAG, campus visits, buddying and talks on HE/career pathways.

Resource and cost efficiencies

- 4.17 Being able to access high quality facilities such as laboratories, libraries and sports equipment has been of obvious benefit to some of the sponsored schools and their learners (it was mentioned by 9 of the 20 HE providers in the sample). Alongside skills development, deepening of knowledge and exposure to new experiences, there has also been a cost saving benefit to the schools. It is likely that many would have incurred a significant financial (and time) outlay were they to try and arrange access to the same level of facilities in the absence of the sponsorship.
- 4.18 Cost efficiencies have also been apparent where the sponsored schools have accessed external services already used by, or in place at, the HE provider. Examples include security, cleaning and facilities management. This study has not attempted to quantify the cost savings involved, but based on the feedback from the HE providers, it seems fair to assume that over time they could become significant.

Networks and future opportunities

- 4.19 Related to the sharing of resources, and indeed to enrichment and industry exposure, is the way in which the sponsorship arrangements have given schools access to a broader network of academic and industry contacts than they would otherwise have had. Over a third (7) of the HE providers gave examples of where these contacts have provided the basis for diverse and high quality learning experiences for their learners. There also appears to be a strong belief that they will continue to do so in the future and that the forward momentum generated to date can be sustained.

A recent Ofsted report of a school in a MAT in London noted the “exceptional links” that had been created with “businesses and high profile universities”. The report went on to state that these links “greatly extend the experiences learners have within and beyond the school day”.

Two new schools (one primary, one sixth form) in the North West of England have both reportedly benefited from their association with the brand and reputation of their HE sponsor. Both schools have received high volumes of applications, despite the HE provider having no track record of primary age teaching.

A UTC in London has benefited from the many opportunities to develop relationships that the sponsorship has offered. The HE sponsor has been able to facilitate access to a range of high profile employers, leading to various events and activities that have reportedly been of great benefit to the learners.

Benefits for the HE Providers

- 4.20 As reported in Chapter 2, HE providers in the sample generally became involved in sponsorships to generate benefits for young people and the sponsored schools rather than for their own institutions. This is reflected in their feedback on the

benefits that have occurred to date, which tend to be young person and school centric.

4.21 That is not to say that the HE providers have themselves not been beneficiaries of the sponsorship arrangements. On the contrary, 19 of the 20 HE sponsors were able to identify at least one benefit that had arisen for their own institution. The most prevalent were:

- **Reputation and profile:** 12 HE providers said that their own reputation and/or profile had been strengthened as a result of the sponsorship. For some, it had given them exposure to local communities whose engagement with HE is typically limited.

An HE provider sponsoring an academy in the South of England reports that the main benefits to their organisation have been reputational. The sponsorship has been well received in the local area and has given the HE provider better and more regular access to the local community than they have had in the past.

- **Pipeline of future learners:** 6 HE providers, and especially those that have undertaken outreach work, provided IAG and/or arranged campus visits, say that they expect to see an increase in the number of young people from those schools applying for HE courses. One reports that it already has. In addition, some HE providers indicated that the anticipated improved performance of young people at schools would improve the quality of future HE entrants, thus impacting on HE success rates.

At a sponsored academy in the Midlands, the proportion of young people in the sixth form applying to the sponsoring university has risen over the life of the sponsorship from 20% to 60%.

- **Understanding the school sector:** 7 HE providers report that they have improved their knowledge of school curriculums, governance and finance, and/or have a better appreciation of the constraints within which schools operate, as a result of the sponsorship.
- **Student and staff opportunities:** the opportunity for teacher training placements, for buddying and mentoring, and for supporting the teaching in sponsored schools has benefited staff and/or students in just under half (9) of the HE providers in the sample.

An HE provider sponsoring a UTC in the South East of England notes the benefits to its undergraduates of becoming involved in outreach work with the sponsored UTC. As well as enhancing their CVs, this provides “rich opportunities... which develop their communication skills and give them experience of communicating complex ideas with younger children”.

At an academy in the South of England, a new uniform was required. This was run as a project by undergraduates at the university's Department of Art and Design, who worked with the school to design a competition and supported learners to take part.

- **General learning experience:** less specific than the points above, but of similar significance, is the feedback received from the majority of HE providers that the sponsorship has been a beneficial learning experience, in spite of, and in some cases because of, the challenges that have arisen. As explained in Chapter 6, lessons have been learned, and tips and recommendations identified, that will stand the HE providers in good stead should they sponsor more schools in the future, or should other HE providers consider a sponsorship for the first time.

Wider Impacts

4.22 Although somewhat less tangible than the other benefits reported in this chapter, 9 of the 20 providers spoke of the positive effects that the sponsorship could have on local communities. These included:

- Greater awareness in the community of HE and progression routes into HE;
- More families viewing HE as a realistic progression route for their children;
- Young people and their parents developing a greater sense of pride in their local area through the wider array of educational and leisure based activities to which they now have access;
- High quality facilities being made available for community based events;
- Parents taking a greater interest in their own learning and development.

An unintended consequence of a sponsorship arrangement in the East of England has been that parents of learners at the sponsored schools have realised that they too can take advantage of opportunities to further their own learning. A number have undertaken Access to University qualifications, which the HE providers views as a very positive outcome.

Monitoring and Evaluation

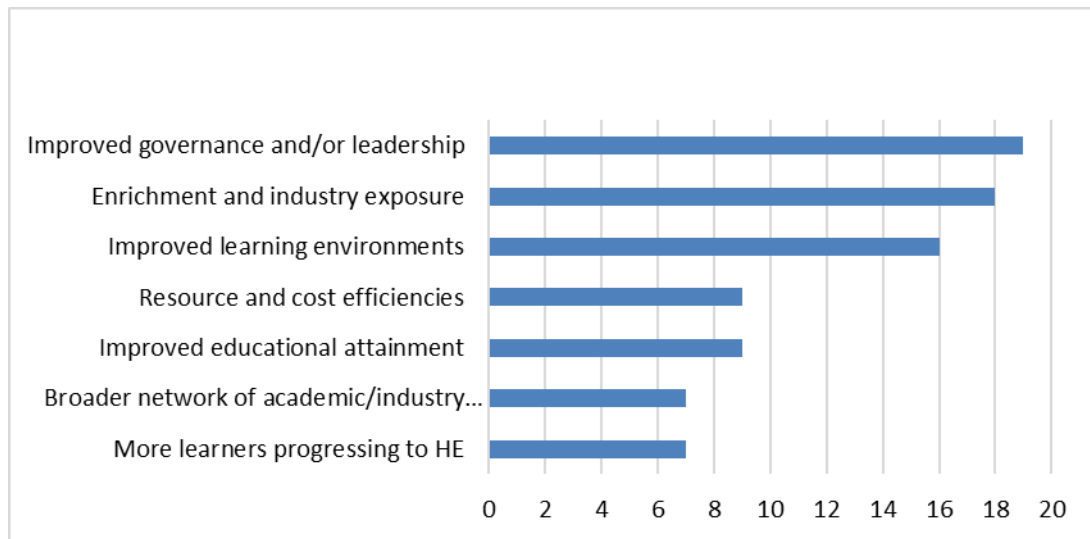
- 4.23 Whilst a great deal of monitoring takes place at the sponsored schools – e.g. on attainment, university applications and progression to HE – nowhere across the sample are the specific effects of the sponsorship being tracked or recorded.
- 4.24 There are various reasons for this, the main one being the challenge of separating the effects, or proportion of an outcome, that can be attributed to an HE provider's sponsorship from the influence of other factors. This may be possible where an HE provider is the sole sponsor of a school, but it would be far more difficult with a large number of co-sponsors.

- 4.25 The fact that outcomes and impacts are not apportioned or attributed across the different partners does not appear to give rise to any concern for those involved. On the contrary, doing so would sit at odds with why most of those partner organisations became involved in the sponsorship in the first place.

Benefits in Summary

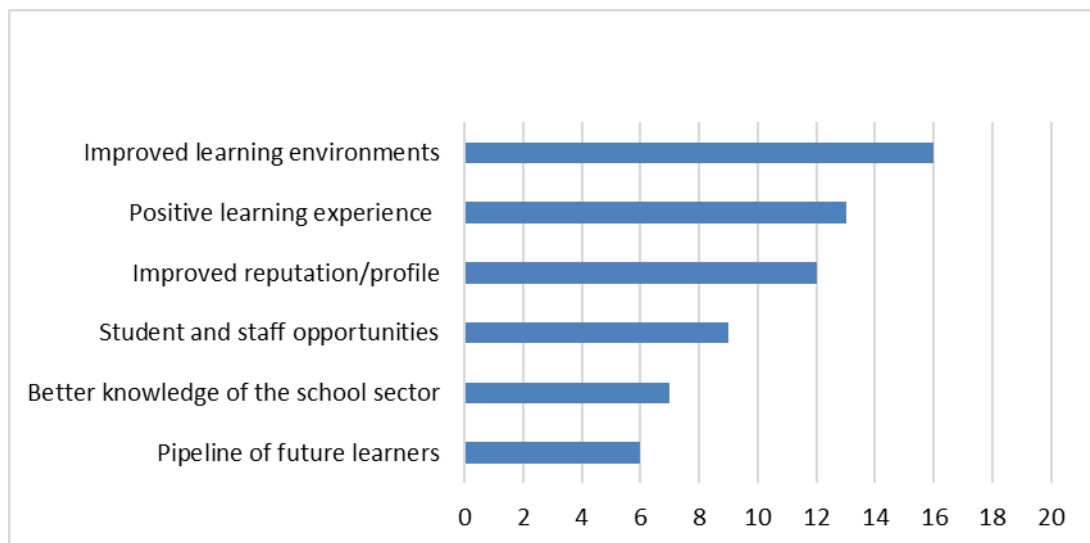
- 4.26 Figures 4.1 and 4.2 summarise the benefits of school sponsorship as reported by the HE providers in the sample. Figure 4.1 covers benefits for the schools whilst Figure 4.2 covers benefits for the HE providers.

Figure 4.1: School benefits in summary



Source: York Consulting

Figure 4.2: HE provider benefits in summary



Source: York Consulting

5 CHALLENGES

Introduction

- 5.1 It is clear that in the majority of cases, sponsoring a school has been a significant undertaking for the HE providers and has involved more time than they originally anticipated. For some, the learning curve has been steep, especially where their previous experience of the school sector was limited or where they had to establish new networks and relationships. Others have had to work through complex issues associated with land acquisition and the legalities of setting up trusts.
- 5.2 This chapter explains the main challenges that have been reported by the HE providers, split into two categories. The first category covers challenges experienced in the establishment and early stages of the sponsorship relationships. The second covers ongoing or longer term challenges.

Establishment and Early Stage Challenges

Time input

- 5.3 Almost without exception, the HE providers have found the time demands of their sponsorship, especially in the early stages, to be significant. As reported earlier, the time input required has varied depending on the sponsorship model, the inputs and expertise of other partners and the specific needs and circumstances of the sponsored institutions. However, the providers variously cited the following as having been time intensive:
- Coordinating and communicating with the different parties involved in the creation of a MAT;
 - Becoming familiar with the application process and requirements for new institutions;
 - Deepening their knowledge of the school sector and the parameters and constraints within which schools operate;
 - Being involved in the design and project management of new builds;
 - Recruiting governors and senior staff;
 - Establishing new employment contracts and terms and conditions;
 - Community and parental engagement.

“A lot of work was involved in integrating three different school brands and policies into a Multi-Academy Trust.” HE provider, Midlands

In the East of England, the establishment of a MAT proved challenging due to the number and array of different parties that needed to be consulted and from whom input was required. The conversion of two schools – one secondary and one primary – was taking place at the same time, which resulted in significant resource implications for those involved.

- 5.4 To overcome these challenges, the HE providers spoke of working in close partnership with other sponsors, of delegating appropriately and of drawing in additional resource from within their own organisations, where they could. But none of these has been a silver bullet. Fundamentally, the HE sponsors have consistently worked hard and have put the required time in, despite it being more than they originally expected.

Engagement and recruitment

- 5.5 In addition to the challenges associated with establishing and/or converting schools, just over half (11) of the HE providers also reported that they had to win hearts and minds, especially those of local parents. For example:
- The establishment of a new academy in the south west of England was met with significant resistance from parents as it signified the end of same-sex schooling in the area and gave rise to concerns about the disruption caused by building a new school. This was overcome through a concerted engagement, consultation and marketing effort, resulting in a two-way dialogue with parents about the benefits the new school would bring and how the disruption would be minimised.
 - For some UTCs, it has proven challenging to recruit learners (and, as a precursor to that, to convince parents) when the institution does not physically exist. In response to this, there are examples where HE providers and their co-sponsors have:
 - Organised local consultation events;
 - Run taster days;
 - Actively sought to engage head teachers at local schools that could act as feeders.
- 5.6 Several HE providers also remarked that having well known, blue chip employers as co-sponsors has been extremely beneficial in them being able to sell the concept and potential benefits of a new school.
- 5.7 Recruitment challenges also extend to staff posts. A quarter (5) of the HE providers reported that their sponsored institution(s) had found it challenging to fill vacancies, especially where new builds were not complete or where predecessor schools had not performed well. This appears to have been overcome by “selling the vision”. In practice this has required enthusiastic and passionate advocates of the schools to persuade potential staff members that they can become part of, and

contribute to, an exciting new opportunity which can also enhance their own professional development.

“We have a Principal whose vision for the academy and for this area is infectious. He is the primary reason why we have been able to recruit such a strong staff team.” HE provider, North West

Establishing roles and responsibilities

- 5.8 Although to some extent a teething trouble that might be expected in sponsorship arrangements, the regularity with which the HE providers cited a lack of certainty over roles and responsibilities in the early stages of the relationships makes it worthy of inclusion here. Providers regularly spoke of the importance of “being clear on who’s responsible for what” and stressed that clarity of role is essential to underpin effective governance.

At a MAT in the South West of England, the absence of formalised roles and responsibilities amongst key partners in the early stages of the sponsorship impacted upon the efficiency of decision making. As time has progressed, roles and responsibilities have become more clearly defined, although partners agree that it would have been beneficial for that to have been the case at the outset.

- 5.9 The example above reflects similar experiences elsewhere, i.e. that with the benefit of time, each sponsoring partner’s role and remit has become clearer and better understood, in some cases aided by the creation of formal documentation (one HE provider has specified the roles and responsibilities of all partners in considerable detail). None of the providers whose sponsorship arrangements are categorised as ‘established’ (see Chapter 2) cited any lingering issues with the definition of partners’ roles and responsibilities.

Other early stage challenges

- 5.10 The challenges below were not raised with the same regularity as those in the preceding sections, but have nonetheless been significant for the HE providers concerned:
- **Financial outlay:** three of the HE providers remarked on the financial contribution they had made in the early stages of the sponsorship, which in some cases was more than they had initially expected. For example, one HE provider reported having spent £40,000 in legal fees in order to develop a robust model of governance across two sponsored institutions. On the related topic of financial management, several HE sponsors commented on the pressures associated with running a new school when student numbers are some way below capacity.
 - **Identifying and securing suitable sites:** one HE provider emphasised the importance of selecting the right site for a new build (in this case a UTC) at the

outset. In this example, two other sites had been explored in some detail, both of which subsequently proved to be unviable. The view from the HE provider was that considerable time and money had been unnecessarily invested and uncertainty created in the local community.

Ongoing Challenges

- 5.11 For the large majority of HE providers in the sample, the challenges associated with the sponsorship arrangements have become less significant and easier to manage as time has passed, as roles and responsibilities have become embedded and as learner numbers (in new schools) have grown. Outlined below, some challenges do, however, persist.

Time commitments

- 5.12 A running theme across the sample is that even when a sponsorship moves into a steady state, the calls that it places on HE providers' time is not to be underestimated. This is influenced by a range of factors including:
- The workload associated with governor/trustee business and meetings;
 - The projects and activities for which the HE sponsor is responsible at a given point in time. As reported elsewhere, these have included placements, buddying, mentoring, outreach and IAG, and subject specific projects and challenges;
 - The goals and aspirations that have been set for the sponsored institution.

At an academy in the North of England, the completion of a new build in 2012 saw the sponsorship arrangements become firmly embedded and mature. However, the ambition of the board of governors, supported by senior staff at the academy, is to make the necessary improvements to achieve a rating of 'Outstanding' at the next Ofsted inspection. It is recognised that this will increase the time commitment required from the sponsoring organisations over the months ahead.

Justifying the investment

- 5.13 At four of the 20 HE providers, it is reported that other staff within the providers, i.e. those that are not directly involved in the sponsorship, have queried the value and benefits of sustaining a sponsorship relationship. In other words, sponsors have had to answer the question, "why are we doing this?".
- 5.14 In one case, changes in senior personnel at the HE provider and a subsequent rethinking of priorities have led to that provider withdrawing from their sponsorship. However, more commonly, questions have been asked about the resources being committed to the sponsorship vis-à-vis the benefits that will be generated for the HE provider.

At an HE provider in the Midlands, some staff have questioned the priority and focus that has been placed on the work with local academies. The response from the individual responsible for the sponsorship has been to reiterate its purpose and to clearly articulate the advantages it could bring for the institution over the longer term.

“If we don’t work with our pipeline and our supply chain we may struggle with our primary HE teaching focus, especially in terms of widening participation. In our case, the pipeline and supply chain is young people coming through schools.”

- 5.15 Two HE providers stressed the importance of ensuring that senior staff within the organisation are clear on what the sponsorship will entail and are bought into it from the outset. Others have circulated reports to their colleagues which demonstrate improvements in attainment and increases in HE progression at the sponsored schools.

Managing risk

- 5.16 In some regards, the management of risk is not a challenge of the sponsorship arrangements per se, but rather is part of the overall approach to effective project management. Nonetheless, the HE providers in the sample are very aware of the ongoing risks associated with their involvement in the sponsorship arrangements. These include:

- **Poor performance at the sponsored school(s):** the most significant risk facing the HE providers is that of reputational damage should the school(s) they are sponsoring perform poorly at inspection and/or against key attainment metrics. Ensuring that this risk does not become a reality is one of the factors influencing the considerable commitment and time input that the HE providers have made (and continue to do so). At least one provider has also sought advice from a former Ofsted inspector.
- **Displacement:** providers noted that, particularly at the sixth form level, the market is rather disparate and in a local area there is often competition for student applications. One HE provider in particular noted that local schools had raised concerns that they would lose learners to the new sixth form created through the sponsorship.

“Setting up a new school or sixth form can be met with resistance.... Consideration must be given to the reaction and response of the local community.” HE provider, North West

- **Subscription:** HE providers cited various risks associated with learner subscription and enrolment. Those that had been involved in the creation of new UTCs recognised the risk of demand being lower than expected (and the knock-on effects this could have financially and to their reputation) whilst others were having to manage being over-subscribed. One provider highlighted the risk of a new school being (wrongly) perceived as an obvious solution for young people that had disengaged from their current schools.

“It is extremely important to be sure that the demand is there for a new school. You have to be as certain as you can be that it is viable, both in the short and longer term. It is wrong simply to assume that if you build it, they will come.” HE provider, North West

5.17 In the main, the providers felt that they were managing these risks effectively and were taking the appropriate steps to mitigate against them having a negative impact.

Challenges in Summary

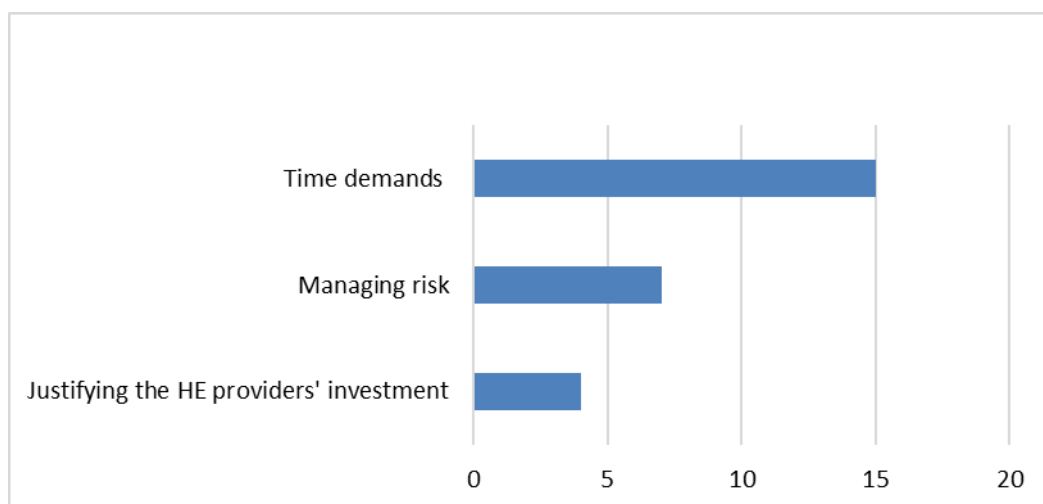
5.18 Figures 5.1 and 5.2 summarise the challenges of school sponsorship as reported by the HE providers in the sample. Figure 5.1 covers early stage challenges and Figure 5.2 covers ongoing challenges.

Figure 5.1: Early stage challenges in summary



Source: York Consulting

Figure 5.2: Ongoing challenges in summary



Source: York Consulting

6 LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS

Introduction

- 6.1 This chapter summarises the feedback from HE providers on what they consider to be the most important lessons they have learned during their sponsorship to date. It also presents a selection of ‘top tips’ that they would advise other HE providers embarking on a sponsorship to take on board. In each case they have been grouped under a series of thematic headings.
- 6.2 None of the lessons or tips, when taken in isolation, guarantees a successful sponsorship. As explained elsewhere in the report, success appears to be predicated upon having the right partners on board and plotting a course of action that responds to local need and circumstance, the finer points of which can differ significantly from one sponsorship to the next. Nonetheless, these lessons and tips should provide a helpful reference guide to those seeking to avoid common pitfalls in the establishment and ongoing management of a sponsorship relationship. Note also that there is some natural overlap across the lessons and tips.

Lessons Learned

- 6.3 Explained below, the key sponsorship related lessons identified by the HE providers include having clarity of purpose, being clear on roles and responsibilities, recognising the required time commitments, engaging and establishing relationships with key stakeholders and having sound knowledge of the school sector.

Topic: Mission and Purpose

- At the outset of the sponsorship, all partners should be in agreement on the vision and strategy. It is important that everyone is clear on what, collectively, they are striving to achieve.
- There may be times when the sponsored school(s), and potentially the sponsorship arrangements, will come in for criticism. Being resilient to this and maintaining a focus on the core objectives of the sponsorship and the sponsored school(s) is important.

Topic: Personnel and Responsibilities

- It is important that the nominated lead at the HE provider has both the capacity and authority to commit the necessary time to the sponsorship and to draw on additional resource from within their organisation when needed.
- Formally documenting the roles and responsibilities of key partners is advisable and helps with the day-to-day delivery of the sponsorship and with succession planning.
- When selecting governors and trustees, it is important to consider whether candidates have the skills, knowledge and confidence to constructively challenge and to take action to address arising issues.
- Candidates must also be willing and able to attend meetings and participate in sponsorship decisions with the regularity required.
- Appointing a Head Teacher or Principal for a new school should be an early priority. As well as having an essential role in staff recruitment and community engagement, some sponsors have found that decisions taken without a Head in post have had to be rethought once a Head had been appointed. This is not the most effective use of sponsors' time.

Topic: Engagement

- When establishing a new school, the importance and value of effectively engaging parents, employers and the wider community as a whole should not be underestimated.
- Linked to the above, it can be challenging to recruit staff and learners to a school that isn't yet built.
- Securing the buy-in of well known employers with strong reputations and branding can be extremely valuable in terms of parental engagement, student recruitment and curriculum enrichment activities.

Topic: Timescales and Time Commitment

- The time inputs required to successfully fulfil the role of an HE sponsor have consistently been greater than the HE providers had anticipated at the outset. This has especially been the case when working with schools requiring improvement.
- Being able to formally ring-fence time for work relating to the sponsorship has been beneficial. It is difficult, over a long period of time, to keep trying to fit it in around other priorities.
- Large amounts of time can easily be consumed exploring the feasibility of different sites for a new build. This should be factored into the project timescales.

Topic: Knowledge

- The application form/process required to set up a free school requires someone/people with the appropriate knowledge, experience and expertise in order to be successful.
- It is important for sponsors to have a base level of knowledge about the different regulations, cultures and funding mechanisms in the school sector. Depending on their prior experience, it can take some time for some sponsors to develop this knowledge.

Topic: Risk

- A formal risk assessment at the outset, endorsed by all partners, can be a worthwhile exercise.

Top Tips

- 6.4 There is a close fit between the lessons learned and HE providers' 'top tips'. Outlined below, the tips cover ambition and purpose, the importance of location, managing dialogue with partners, effective planning, recognising the need for support and advice, and monitoring and reporting.

Topic: Ambition and Purpose

- Aim high and be passionate. It is difficult to generate the enthusiasm and motivation that you need amongst your key partners if the project/mission doesn't inspire.
- Be courageous with the curriculum. The set-up of a free school provides the opportunity to do something different. Take advantage of this.
- Be sure you are entering into the sponsorship for the right reasons. It isn't a quick or easy way to increase student numbers at a university.

Topic: Location

- When considering the location of a UTC, proximity to the university should be a key priority. There are significant benefits to be had for the learners (e.g. facilities, role models and HE experience) as well as for the HE provider and the UTC in terms of economies of scale and efficiencies associated with shared services.

Topic: Partners

- Ensure that all partners are signed up to the vision and strategy.
- Formally document the roles and responsibilities of all key partners and co-sponsors.
- Maintain a close and regular dialogue across all partners.
- Try to ensure that the sponsorship arrangements deliver benefits for all parties involved, not just some.

Topic: Planning

- If you are establishing a new institution, be as certain as you can that a critical mass of demand exists.
- Establish an appropriate governance structure as early as possible.
- Conduct a thorough risk assessment.
- Don't underestimate the amount of time that you will be required to commit to the sponsorship.

Topic: Support and Advice

- Ensure that you have full support for the sponsorship from senior stakeholders in your HE organisation.
- Don't be afraid to seek advice from other people that have embarked on a similar project.
- Recognise that you are likely to need specialist support, e.g. financial and legal. Identify the most appropriate channels through which to source that support as an early priority.

Topic: Monitoring and Reporting

- Put a plan in place (with targets) against which to monitor activity and achievements.
- Proactively communicate success and don't be afraid to champion your achievements. It is important that people recognise what has been accomplished as a result of the sponsors' contributions.
- Keep on top of reporting requirements (financial reports, accounts etc.) in the way expected by the DfE.